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Allegiances

THUNDERCLAN

Leader: Bluestar--blue-gray she-cat, tinged with silver around her muzzle.

Apprentice, Firepaw

Deputy: Redtail --a dark tortoiseshell tom with a bushy dark ginger tail and amber eyes.

Apprentice, Dustpaw

Medicine Cat: Spottedleaf--beautiful dark tortoiseshell she-cat with a distinctive dappled coat.

Warriors: (toms, and she-cats without kits)

Lionheart--magnificent golden tabby tom with thick fur like a lion's mane.

Apprentice, Graypaw
Tigerclaw-big dark brown tabby tom with unusually long front claws.

Apprentice, Ravenpaw

Whitestorm --big white tom.

Apprentice, Sandpaw

Darkstripe --sleek black-and-gray tabby tom.

Longtail--pale tabby tom with dark black stripes.

Runningwind--swift tabby tom.

Willowpelt--very pale gray she-cat with unusual blue eyes.

Mousefur--small dusky brown she-cat.

Apprentices: (more than six moons old, in training to become warriors)

Dustpaw--dark brown tabby tom.

Graypaw--long-haired solid gray tom.

Ravenpaw--small, skinny black tom with a tiny white dash on his chest, and a white-tipped tail.

Sandpaw--pale ginger she-cat.

Firepaw--handsome ginger tom.

Queens: (she-cats expecting or nursing kits)

Frostfur--beautiful white coat and blue eyes.

Brindleface--pretty tabby.

Goldenflower--pale ginger coat.

Speckletail--pale tabby, and the oldest nursery queen.

Elders: (former warriors and queens, now retired)

Halftail--big dark brown tabby tom with part of his tail missing.

Smallear--gray tom with very small ears. The oldest tom in ThunderClan.

Patchpelt--small black-and-white tom.

One-eye--pale gray she-cat, the oldest cat in ThunderClan. Virtually blind and deaf.

Dappletail--once-pretty tortoiseshell she-cat with a lovely dappled coat.

SHADOWCLAN

Leader: Brokenstar--long-haired dark brown tabby.

Deputy: Blackfoot--large white tom with huge jet-black paws.

Medicine Cat: Yellowfang--old dark gray she-cat with a broad, flattened face.

Warriors: Clawface--battle-scarred brown tom.

Apprentice, Littlepaw

Wetfoot - gray tabby tom

A*pprentice,* Oakpaw

Stumpytail - brown tabby tom.

Apprentice, Brownpaw

RIVERCLAN

Leader: Crookedstar--a huge light-colored tabby with a twisted jaw.

Deputy: Oakheart--a reddish brown tom.

Medicine Cat: Mudfur --long-haired light brown tom.

WINDCLAN

Leader: Tallstar--a black-and-white tom with a very long tail.

Medicine Cat: Barkface--a short-tailed brown tom.

CATS OUTSIDE THE CLANS

Lily - pretty, long-haired, calico she-cat with bright, amber eyes

Prologue

Four Clans circled the great rock beneath the full moon. The clearing below shimmered in pale light, pelts blending and parting like rippled water. A golden tabby tom stood tall above the crowd, silencing them, his tail lashing over the hushed tones. A silver tabby tom rose to his paws, "We should tell them." he yowled. The golden tabby was brighter than the sun almost blinding him.

"You know very well that we can't tell them, Featherwhisker." The orange tom meowed, his eyes narrowing to slits.

"We know that these Clans will suffer if we don't." Featherwhisker took a step forward and raked his claws against the hard earth.

"We don't know that."

"We know enough, Sunstar. They will suffer if we just let..."

"You are not to tell them and that's my final word."

"Who put you in charge?" rasped a she-cat, her starry pelt thin as smoke. She padded slowly, but her stance was made clear. Had she thought the same?
"I was once leader there. I at least have a say." Sunstar growled, licking his paw in annoyance.
The she-cat gave a purr in amusement. She opened her mouth and curled her lip in a snarl, then relaxed her tortoiseshell fur as she glanced back at Featherwhisker who was now hanging his head low, his eyes still sparkling with hope. "Sunstar is right. We must wait."

Featherwhisker lashed his plumbing tail in anger and ran through the trees not looking back. He kept racing, zigzagging between the sunlit trunks. Soft grass bent beneath his paws and birds bursts from the undergrowth as he made his way to a small stream of water. It rippled softly and had plenty of fish swimming through the currents. But being from StarClan, that didn't stop him. He plunged

through with ease, only having to shake off a few droplets from his thick silver fur.

"We know enough about the prophecy. Enough to warn them." The trees opened into a wide clearing. He stopped at the edge, and scanned its empty grasslands. It seemed quiet. Almost too quiet.

"Who are you?" meowed a soft voice a few fox-lengths away.

Featherwhisker whipped his head around in confusion, eyes wide with concern. Did he accidentally travel too far? He did not recognize this voice, though it sounded more like a kittypet than anything else. A small calico cat stood before him, her amber gaze wide and expressionless. "Name's Lily," she purred.

Chapter One

Lily pounced onto a flying leaf, missing it as a gust of wind took flight. She laid back her ears and pounced onto another, catching it between her paws. She closed her eyes and happily purred with amusement. The day went by fast, her eyes now big as a full moon adjusting to the darkness. Lily padded home, jumping over a large white fence and into a garden full of roses and daisies. Her whiskers brushed up against the thorns and bushes, though that didn't bother her as she pushed onward. She was used to it. During the season green-leaf, the thorns would grow, and she was let outside every now and then to get some fresh air. She would use those times to hunt. She squeezed through a small flap that led into the den then curled onto a small round nest. Closing her eyes and drifting off to sleep, almost instantly she began to dream.

"Psst, Lily," meowed a voice, "over here."

"Featherwhisker?" she purred.

Featherwhisker was a fairly large cat. He had a smooth, long, silver-gray pelt, with amber eyes and a very fluffy tail. Lily didn't have to think twice on why he was named Featherwhisker though he had her told moons ago. She padded up to him and rubbed his cheek with hers like an old friend. "What news do you bring today?" she meowed, sitting down and wrapping her tail over her front paws.

"ThunderClan doesn't have much news," he replied, licking his chest, "ShadowClan on the other paw, is getting up to some mischief as usual."

Lily alerted her ears and twitched one of them. "Wow, what a shock."

Featherwhisker could feel the sarcasm and purred with amusement. She crouched down onto her belly into a loaf position, keeping her tail tightly wrapped around her. "So what has Brokenstar been getting into this time?"

Featherwhisker imitated her loaf position, tucking in his paws closer to his chest, "Brokenstar is planning something. I'm not sure what, but it'll be bad." he paused, looking into the distance as if to think. "Crookedstar seems to be planning something as well. I have a slight feeling they're working together. I'd like to let them know, but not like we can do anything about it. They have to figure things for themselves at times."

She jolted awake from the sound of food being poured into a bowl. She wanted to continue her dream — to try and help Featherwhisker figure out what Crookedstar and Brokenstar was planning, but instead of lingering on the dream, she decided to go back outside. She ignored her pet's gesture to eat the food and ran through a door flap leading to the garden once more.

She jumped on a fairly large post, and sat down as she looked out into the distance, where a small forest of trees and a river ran through in the distance. She could barely see past the first few row of trees, though she knew a river was not far from the smell of it.

She stretched out her front paws, almost losing her balance, but caught herself by straightening out her tail. Despite being food in her dish already, she decided to go out hunting for something. It's been a while since she did. There's no harm in it. She leaped down the fence, and scanned around. She didn't want to get caught up in the water. She hated water. The only thing water is good for is drinking. Everyone should know that. She crept further down wind, keeping her gaze fixated on the grass below. She opened her jaws, searching for any signs of mice. She wasn't a good hunter, but she enjoyed at least trying.

She heard a loud rustling noise, but before she could take the time to react, out jumped a gray she-cat. She was fairly small, but looked bigger when she poofed out her fur. In the light, she seemed almost blue. Lily pulled back her ears in anger. "You stupid furball," she hissed, remembering she was hunting for mice. "This is my territory."

The gray she-cat stopped to look at Lily. She was amazed to see a kittypet so close to the river. "I-This is RiverClan territory!" she growled confidently, shaking her head as if to clear it.

Lily rolled her eyes and scoffed, "No, you're near *my* territory. And that mouse you smelled was mine. Next time, find your own." She had smelled the mouse seconds before the gray she-cat arrived.

"You're a kittypet." The warrior meowed softly, licking her paw.

"Yeah, and you're a warrior." She replied, rather harshly.

The small she-cat was stunned by her rudeness. Normally kittypets were soft and gentle, but she was grouchy and seemed rather daring. "I'm actually an apprentice." She meowed, "I'll be a warrior once I master the waters." She paused for a few short moments. "I'm Mistypaw."

Lily stared blankly at Mistypaw. She didn't want to continue talking, but she guessed that she wouldn't leave if she didn't at least answer. "My name's Lily." She meowed, her voice softer this time. It sounded more what Mistypaw would expect from a kittypet. "I should probably get going." she added, as she began to pad away.

"Nice meeting you, Lily!" Mistypaw shouted after her, then headed the other way heading back towards the river.

Lily couldn't shake off the thought of meeting a Clan cat. Featherwhisker had spoken about RiverClan and their leader, Crookedstar. She knew he had an accident when he was young and had busted his jaws. She knew their deputy Oakheart, for he was shown in some of her visions. She knew the medicine cat Mudfur, and some of the healing herbs they use.

Later that night as she headed back, the air became thick and foggy and night took over the land. Though her eyes adjusted quickly to the night, she was scared of the unknown. There was much didn't know about the Clans and their territories, but she didn't let that get the better of her.

Nearing the base of home, she slipped between the small opening of the white fence. Her pet was already in their nests all sprawled out, their limbs facing every which way. Lily's nest was just beside theirs. She preferred it that way. Those big nofurs move way too much for a mere creature like Lily. She laid down to rest, circling

around until she found a comfortable position. Closing her eyes, exhausted from the day out attempting to hunt, almost catching a mouse and meeting an apprentice — all which was quite the surprise, was not something she'd like to do on a regular.

"Featherwhisker?" she called out, immediately recognizing the clearing. She's been here many times before in her dreams. "Featherwhisker?" she called out again, hoping he would answer. She didn't always dream of StarClan when she went to sleep. It was only a few times every moon. She had just spoken to him last night. Was it because she woke up too soon?

"Lily," meowed a familiar voice, "I'm here." He padded over to her from out of the forest, tail up and plumbing over his back.

"I met a RiverClan cat," Lily began, excited to tell him about her encounter. "It was a RiverClan apprentice."

"Oh, and they let you go? Count yourself lucky, Lily."

"It was Mistypaw. She seemed rather nice." she reassured him, though she was surprised the RiverClan cat did let her go. They aren't usually one to let a cat hunt near their territory. She wasn't actually *in* their territory.

"You should join the Clans," he quickly changed the subject.

Lily turned slowly, and laid her ears flat against her head. "Join? Why would I want to leave my life here?" She felt disgusted by the thought.

"You're needed in ThunderClan. You have visions of them don't you? Find your way to ThunderClan, and talk to Bluestar."

Chapter Two

Lily's long-haired, calico fur ruffled up as she cleaned herself. She couldn't stop thinking about what Featherwhisker had said. It had stung her like a thousand bees, but she couldn't think of leaving her cozy den. She tried shaking out the thought, but it just wouldn't go away. "Perhaps it's time I leave and just join ThunderClan." she meowed softly to herself.

Later that night after she finished her food, she set foot outside once again. She wasn't happy about it. It was dark and a dreary. "Great." she hissed, shaking off as rain came pouring down. She trotted toward the white picket fence, her pelt now laid flat on her body. She wanted nothing more than to just go back inside and dry off, but she knew she was doing the right thing. She had to be. She was setting off for ThunderClan and that was enough for now — even though she had no idea where she was going. The rain pitter-pattered harder and her long coat was drenched. "I need to get out of the rain." she muttered. Padding quickly through the small set of trees there was wide open space and a steep hill which led to a gorge. Which way? She couldn't stop now. She was already wet, how much wetter could she get?

She found herself getting lost, and her eyes stung from the rain as it poured down harder. The ground became soggy and slippery. She could barely see a tail-length in front of her from the fog that began to settle. All of a sudden, she slid down the steep hill and tumbled down. She couldn't get a grip, and kept sliding until she hit something cold. It was the river and she had no strength to fight the harsh current which took her far beyond her home.

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"What is it?" meowed a large black tom.

"Smells of a kittypet." growled a small apprentice.

"Get out of the way!" hissed a long-haired, light, brown tom. "Give

her some space." he added, cooly.

Lily coughed and gasped for air, looking around and saw blurred cats standing around her. She tried to stand up, but fell back down, panting hard. She felt like she couldn't catch her breath, her legs screamed with agony.

"Calmly focus on your breathing." She heard the light brown tom tell her. "It's going to be alright."

Lily gulped for air, catching her breath, now looking up at the tom. She recognized him from the description of Featherwhisker. "Why are you being so nice to me?" she asked surprised a Clan cat was helping her. She knew from Mistypaw they were hostile towards kittypets. If she wouldn't have turned around and try to attack, she could have been turned into crowfood.

"I am a medicine cat. I take care of all cats, even if they are kittypets." he replied, pawing at a herb and tearing it between his teeth, "my name's Mudfur."

"I thought I recognized you." she meowed softly, still a little weak. " I'm Lily."

"You know me?" he mewed, almost in a whisper.

"I..." she paused, realizing there was still a lot of cats around them. "Can we talk in private?"

Mudfur nodded and gestured to the other cats to move along with just a flick of his tail. Lily was rather amused. Did they always listen to medicine cats so well?

"I spoke with Featherwhisker, and I must speak with Bluestar," she confessed, now able to stand on her own, and the other RiverClan cats weren't within earshot.

Mudfur tilted his head. "A kittypet is able to talk to StarClan?" He stepped away a whisker-length, letting her steady herself.

"I cannot answer anything more until I find ThunderClan and speak with Bluestar. Please, you must help me. All I can say is that her

Clan is in danger."

Mudfur looked over at a rather small den where their leader laid. "Crookedstar!" he shouted.

Crookedstar came trotting over. His fur was light colored, with huge tabby markings, and he had the crooked jaw from the stories she's heard about. "Lily here is from up north there, she says she needs to speak with Bluestar." Mudfur says in a hushed voice, and pointing with muzzle.

"You want me to take a kittypet to ThunderClan?" The leader questioned him, eyes narrowing.

"No." replied Mudfur, "I want you to *find* someone to take her. Our Clan is much too vulnerable for you to leave. Leaf-bare is among us soon. I can feel it in the wind."

Crookedstar didn't reply, he just swiftly nodded and looked around and scanned the area. Was he searching for the right cat to take Lily to ThunderClan? Crookedstar then stopped his gaze on a reddish-brown tom. "Oakheart!" he yowled across the clearing. "I have a mission for you."

Oakheart padded over, his eyes locked onto Lily. "What is it?" he mewed, in a rather soft voice as if to not scare away the kittypet.

"Take this kittypet.."

Lily stomped the ground and interrupted him, with a rather hostile voice, "I am not just a kittypet. I know a lot more than you think about the Clans." Her eyes were now narrow slits. Not that she didn't like the word, 'kittypet'— but she was not an ordinary kittypet, and she surely wasn't going to let them think she was weak.

Crookedstar stood in silence, not knowing what to do. He has never heard one talk this harshly before. They normally have a soft voice. Rogues and Loners even have a softer voice compared to hers. "Right." he stuttered, "Take—uh— Lily, to Bluestar." He drifted his gaze to Oakheart.

The tall-legged brown tom nodded and swiftly flicked his tail to Lily.

As Lily followed him, she could sense that he had some tension. Was it because he didn't want to take her? Or was it something deeper? He trotted along looking forward in silence, racing up and down the small slopes. He then headed up to a river and stopped. "On the other side is ThunderClan." Oakheart meowed.

Lily sighed as she recognized the river Featherwhisker had explained to her. There was Sunningrocks. The huge rock RiverClan and ThunderClan constantly fight over. *That's what they argue over?* She thought, staring at it. Couldn't RiverClan lay out in the sun in this end? They didn't have as many trees as ThunderClan did. Surely they had enough sunlight near their camp. Waterpaw could feel the warmth from the hot son above them.

"Here." meowed Oakheart. "We must cross. It's shallow here."

"We have to cross?" she repeated, then immediately cleared her throat, "I can swim you know," she finished with a hiss.

Oakheart scoffed and chuckled with amusemnet, "yeah, I could tell by the looks of it. You seemed to be really good at swimming. Or shall I say, drowning?"

Lily rolled her amber eyes, then plunged into the river. She couldn't really touch the river's floor, but she was at least capable of swimming a few fox-lengths across. She could feel the cold hitting her instantly. Oakheart then paddled after her, him being more experienced, passed her and then shook off his pelt with ease, his fur becoming dry almost instantly with just a few shakes.

Lily paddled faster and struggled to get up back up the rise of the earth, separating the ground from the river. Oakheart had to pull her out by her neck with his teeth. "Thanks." she coughed, hot with embarrassment. Shaking off her pelt aggressively, she still felt drenched. Would she ever be dry again? She had rain before, and then falling into the river of RiverClan; this was enough water to last her for the rest of her life.

Catching up with Oakheart, they made it Sunningrocks. Dense forest of trees lay ahead now, making Lily shiver. She wasn't used to thick trees and bushes, making many spots for hiding. Not only for mice, but for other cats. Oakheart trumbled, then padded onward. Lily wondered if he too was nervous. He was a warrior. He couldn't be afraid of such a thing, right?

"Are you okay?" she finally decided to ask him as they reached the forest.

"Yeah, I just don't really want to see someone." he confessed, keeping his gaze fixated ahead.

Chapter Three

Lily wondered who he might be talking about. Not like she would know of the cat. She only knew a pawful of them. She turned her gaze from Oakheart, to a pretty blue-gray she-cat. He pricked his ears and looked at the familiar colors of Bluestar.

Bluestar spoke first, "Oakheart." She meowed, "What brings you here to Sunningrocks?" She asked softly her gaze looking back and forth from the kittypet to Oakheart.

Lily could sense him not wanting to speak, so she went first, "He's here to take me to you. You're Bluestar, aren't you? I'm Lily."

Bluestar just nodded. Warriors behind her stood in confusion, though they obeyed her every flick of silence. One of the warriors, was a huge golden tom which Lily didn't recognize. He was quite intimidating. "I am." Bluestar finally confirmed. "What is it you wish to see me for?"

"I.." she paused almost unable to speak. "I want to talk with you, i-in private."

Bluestar flicked her ears as if she was going to say no, but instead she dipped her head swiftly. "Thank you, Oakheart. You may return. I can handle young Lily here." she finished with a smile.

Oakheart padded away towards the river in with a swift nod. Lily looked back at the brown tom as he left. He seemed almost saddened by something. Was it that he was leaving ThunderClan so early? Or was he actually *hoping* to meet the someone he mentioned?

"Come." meowed Bluestar as she and her warriors headed towards ThunderClan camp. Lily followed after them still lost in thought. She then paced herself closely behind them shaking out the thoughts of Oakheart and onto the fast cats ahead. Her legs pounded and begged for her to slow down, but she kept going

despite the pain.

When they reached camp, Lily was thankful to have finally stopped and she panted hard. Looking around, once she caught her breath, she was amazed at the shere size. It was much bigger and better than she imagined. Suddenly she was aware of other cats emerging from their dens and staring at her. Lily still padded proudly behind Bluestar as she headed toward the highrock. She could hear some of their words of digust and fowl words as they passed by them.

"Another kittypet?" Hissed a pale tabby. "This Clan is turning too soft!"

"Why does Bluestar keep letting these kittypets in?" hissed another.

"If we keep accepting them, we won't be Clan blood anymore!"

Bluestar silenced them all with just a wave of her tail, still padding deeper into camp. She turned to her warriors. "You may go and do the rest of your duties." she hissed, stopping at the base of the rock ledge.

Lily stood, watching Bluestar. Her eyes were a pretty pale blue. They sparkled in the sunlight, while her fur shimmered. Bluestar then led her to the den which laid above the highrock. It was quite large inside. Moss lay bundled up together at the corner of the den and a pile of bones from an eaten seconds ago.

"Bluestar," meowed Lily. "There are some things about your Clan that you must know." She mimicked Bluestar's sitting position by crossing her tail over her front paws.

Bluestar blinked in silence and showed no emotions. "Such as?"

"Tigerclaw, he is not who you think he is."

"Tigerclaw is big and can be intimidating, but he is no threat to ThunderClan. He is respected by all warriors."

"There will be a time when you see his treacheries." She retorted. Lily then began to walk away, knowing Bluestar was too headstrong to listen.

"Wait!"Lily stopped and turned to Bluestar, keeping her paw up as if frozen in time. "How do you know so much?"

"I spoke with a StarClan cat named Featherwhisker. I've been speaking with him ever since I was young. And I've had visions of the future." At least I think it's the future, but she wouldn't dare say the last bit out loud.

"Join us." Bluestar's voice was suddenly inistant. "We are in need of more warriors. I can find someone to train you. You can be an apprentice until you're ready."

Lily looked down and remembered Featherwhisker's words, *You should join them instead*. Sighing she turned the rest of her body. "Yes, I'll join." she finally agreed.

Bluestar's ears pricked up almost with excitement. "I shall appoint you one immediately." She got up and quickly padded towards the middle of camp. She stepped up onto the highrock and cried out, "Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey, gather beneath the highrock for a Clan meeting."

Lily padded towards a small gray tom. "Hello, I'm Lily."

"Wow! Two kittypets in one moon. No other Clan would believe us. I'm Graypaw and this is Firepaw. He joined just yesterday and..."

Bluestar cut him off and began to speak. "It is true, we have another kittypet joining us." She glanced around the crowd of cats below her. "We are in need of warriors, and I have asked her to join us. Lily, please come forward." She beckoned her with a flick of her tail.

Lily padded slowly toward the highrock, ears pulled back from embarrasment. She stood and ignored all of the hateful glares she could feel looking her way. Bluestar jumped down from the highrock and touched noses with Lily. "Lily, from this moment on until you have received your warrior name, you will be known as," Bluestar paused for a moment, "Waterpaw."

Waterpaw wasn't too fond of the name *Water*, but if it's what

Bluestar chose, it made her feel apart of the Clan. When she heard her new fellow clanmates shout out her name, she could feel some restraint in their voices. "Waterpaw, Waterpaw, Waterpaw!"

"Runningwind." called Bluestar. "You are ready for your first apprentice. I believe that you will train Waterpaw to be a fine warrior."

Runningwind looked blankly at her. Waterpaw guessed he was going to decline, but he instead padded toward her and looked down with kindness. "I will raise you to be a great warrior. Everyone else won't know what hit them." he promised.

Waterpaw felt her shoulders relax and knew from now on everything was going to be alright. The rest of the Clan seemed to ignore Waterpaw and went back to their normal duties. Perhaps that's how she liked it. She wasn't used to so many cats in one place. Runningwind nudged her shoulder and stood beside her. "Come on, I'll show you where we can find some food and a comfy nest for you to sleep. Tomorrow, I'll show you the rest of the territory. And maybe Bluestar will even let you come to the Gathering tomorrow night."

Waterpaw had heard about the Gatherings at Fourtrees. Featherwhisker made them out to be something wonderful. She just hoped he was right and that the Clan will accept her a bit more. But at least she'll be training to be a warrior and they'll *have to* accept her. Firepaw seemed like he adjusted well enough in just one sunrise. It couldn't be so hard.

Chapter Four

Waterpaw awoke with a startle, her eyes jolted open and she looked around the apprentices' den. "Where is everyone?" she meowed half to herself as she saw a bunch of empty nests.

"Yes, a pity, after all your valuable training, he dies in his first fight, eh?" Spottedleaf mewed from just outside the den. Waterpaw peered out, Ravenpaw was lying on his side, blood pouring out of his right leg. Spottedleaf quickly gathered the cobwebs, which was caught in between her claws, and began wrapping it around. Ravenpaw winced in pain from every movement she made.

"Will he live?" Tigerclaw demanded, standing over his apprentice.

"Of course, he just needs rest is all." She bit off the hanging cobwebs, leaving him to rest.

"Are you ready?" meowed a familiar voice from behind the dark tabby. Waterpaw watched as Runningwind came into view, his tail and head held high, "ready?" he repeated.

"Yes!" She bounded towards him, now ignoring the situation happening beside her.

"Leave him alone," Spottedleaf hissed in the background as Runningwind and Waterpaw padded up the ravine and out the gorse tunnel.

"We'll practice some hunting today. We're in need more prey for the fresh-kill pile. And I think we can do a tour a bit later." Runningwind said as he skidded to a halt just a few tail-lengths from a large beech nut tree, "Mice should be around here. Since leaf-bare is close, they'll try anything to get a taste of those beechnuts." He crouched down low, and kept his body close to the ground, ears pulled back. "Follow my lead," he ordered, watching as Waterpaw attempted to imitate his stance. "Go down lower and keep your tail still. You could wake up a badger with that thing."

Waterpaw noticed she had swept away every fallen leaf behind her with her tail. Feeling embarrassed, she crouched down lower doing as Runningwind had asked. She twitched her nose, not able to smell a thing. Not even the smallest scent of a bird fluttering past them.

Runningwind crept slowly, his eyes locked onto a tree further down the path. Waterpaw followed his gaze. What did he find? A mouse? A squirrel? She stayed where she was, waiting for the next order of business. If she was to become a warrior, following simple directions should at least be something she's good at. He stopped, waited for what seemed like moons, then pounced onto a rather large leaf. Hidden underneath was a plump mouse, he now had between his jaws as he lifted his head in pride. "See, easy. You try." He prompted with his tail with a quick flick.

Waterpaw searched around the canopy of the tree, still crouched where she was. A few leaves drifted past her as the wind picked up, making her fur ruffle. She stayed quiet and very still, careful not to move a morsel. Not even the slightest itch could make her move now. She stared at the tree for what seemed like hours. She parted her lips to taste the air, in case any scent was carried the other way, but she could smell nothing. Absolutely nothing. Was Runningwind wrong? Would the mice really risk their life for a beechnut?

Just as Waterpaw thought all hope was lost, she heard a slight rustle come from under a pile of orange and red leaves. She crept slowly, remembering what Runningwind did by staying low to the ground, ears pulled back. Once she was within the right distance, she stopped and quickly leaped into the pile. To her disappointment, she lifted her paws and found only crunched leaves underneath.

"Don't worry young one, you'll get it." Runningwind encouraged.

Waterpaw looked back at him, her eyes filled with worry. When she was back at her nofur's, she hunted often by the beds of the flowers. Mice and birds hung there around almost every day. They must have been slower compared to the ones in the forest. Would she ever be able to catch the ones here?

"There's a squirrel just up that tree," whispered Runningwind,

pointing with his muzzle toward the horizon. Waterpaw followed his gaze once more, finally locking onto her prey as she quickly got into position, this time making sure her belly and tail were flat against the earth. She was going to get the squirrel. It was plump, making it slower. She jumped, landing half way up the trunk. The squirrel fled further up, jumping from branch to branch with ease, despite its size. Waterpaw dug in her claws and heaved herself up the trunk and then finally onto a thick branch sticking out several tail-lengths. She gasped in horror not able to keep herself from looking down. She quickly dug into the wood, eyes wide and her body trembling.

"Waterpaw, can you come down?" Runningwind asked, suddenly noticing her uncomfortableness. Waterpaw stood motionless, not able to move, not able to breathe. She felt like she was caught in between life and death itself, its paws reaching out for her. Runningwind raced up the tree, his claws easily retracting as he scurried up and onto the same branch of Waterpaw. "Okay, now turn towards me." He beckoned, taking a step closer to her. Waterpaw still couldn't move; she was frozen in place as if the earth decided to swallow her up turning her into ice. "Waterpaw," Runningwind called out again.

Waterpaw shook her head to clear it and slowly turned her body to face Runningwind. She stepped carefully, placing each paw into a tiny groove so she wouldn't slip.

"Good, keeping coming closer," Runningwind called, backing away and stopping just a hair from the trunk. "It's not that far to jump down from here." He placed his body down the trunk, clawing his way, then jumped onto the ground with a loud thump. Waterpaw hesitated, feeling even more anxious than she did. Was she going to be stuck up here forever?

"Come on, jump Waterpaw." Runningwind encouraged her once more, now looking up at her from the ground.

Waterpaw took a deep breath and closed her eyes not able to watch as she leaped down, tumbling into Runningwind, pushing him off his paws. "Oof!" He cried as he shook out his fur from the tiny bits of moss that clung to his short tabby fur.

"Sorry," she mewed, still shook up from being so high off the ground.

"Don't worry, this is just your first try. I'd be shocked if you got it the first time. I didn't expect you to go after the squirrel." he praised her, his head held high with pride. Waterpaw wanted to believe him, though she had her doubts.

Once they arrived back in camp, most of the Clan had already returned from their daily patrols. The fresh-kill pile had plenty to choose from, despite the cold chill of wind that ruffled Waterpaw's fur as the sun went down. Paws raced across the clearing; Waterpaw whirled around to see who and why they came into camp so fast. Did something happen?

Bluestar was already up on the highrock, her voice carrying over the camp, "What happened, Ravenpaw?"

Waterpaw recognized the small black tom. He had just a bit of white on his chest and the tip of his tail. He was scrawny, and she remembered how Tigerclaw wanted him to get up after Spottedleaf had just told him he needed rest. Did Tigerclaw push him too far once again?

"We were in Sunningrocks," he began, staggering himself up onto the highrock. He looked down at the Clan, who was all now sitting in the clearing, all wondering the same thing. Ravenpaw continued, trying to keep himself calm, "I—we were with Oakheart and he..." The small apprentice collasped and slid off the edge onto the ground.

"Spottedleaf!" Cried out a golden she-cat. It was Goldenflower, one of the queens. She wasn't his mother, but she must have cared deeply enough to care for him. Spottedleaf raced out of the den, herbs already in her jaws. When she reached him, she lowered her head over his flank and listened to his breathing

"He'll be fine. I'll give him some poppy seeds to help him sleep for the night." she meowed, reassuring the queen who was now beside them.

A dark shadow rose above the clouds as Tigerclaw padded into camp with a limp tortoiseshell tom wrapped tightly in his jaws. "Redtail's death was not in vain. He died with honor, struck down from Oakheart. I couldn't save him, but I managed to take Oakheart's life while he was gloating over his victory."

Chapter Five

Redtail is dead! My vision came true. Waterpaw eyes widened with fear. Tigerclaw is lying, but she didn't have enough proof to just call him out now. She held in her tongue, letting the Clan say goodbye to the deputy one last time. Waterpaw stayed behind. She didn't really know him after all. She had only joined a few day ago. Waterpaw longed to go to sleep in her nest, but she also wondered who Bluestar would choose as the new deputy. She shuddered at the thought of her choosing Tigerclaw. Shaking her head to clear it, she padded closer to the highrock as Bluestar heaved herself up, her head still hung low with grief.

" I say these before the body of Redtail, so that his spirit may hear and approve of my choice." Bluestar paused for a moment as if to catch her breath, "Lionheart will be the new deputy of ThunderClan." She looked over at the large golden tom, his neck fur was almost twice the size of him.

He dipped his head, "Thank you, Bluestar." he purred loud enough for the whole Clan to hear. Once the camp cleared away Redtail's body and the elders and queens burried him — leaving the camp feel empty, Waterpaw padded to the apprentices' den, feeling more exhuasted than ever.

"Waterpaw, over here." meowed the familiar voice of Featherwhisker. Waterpaw pricked her ears and saw a fluffy, silver tabby standing near a large pool of water. He was motionless, keeping his gaze fixated on the ripples.

"What is it?" Waterpaw wasted no time. She was interested in what the old tom had to say. Since she's joined ThunderClan, her visions and dreams with him seem to have faded. Plus she was eager to tell him about Redtail.

He kept quiet for a few moments, twitching just the tip of his tail. "It is time." He growled low and slow.

Waterpaw tilted her head to the side, "Time?" she repeated, "time for what?"

"Tigerclaw will stop at nothing once he becomes deputy."

"I've already tried to warn Bluestar. She only tells me he's ambitious. That he wouldn't dare kill a warrior."

Featherwhisker turned his head to face Waterpaw, "Fire alone is to save the Clans."

"Fire?" she repeated his words again in disbelief. "Fire destroys everything in its path. How is that to save us?" Waterpaw was now more confused than ever. How could something so awful save all the Clans?

"Use your wits, Waterpaw." Featherwhisker then walked away into the distance between the heather and ferns and faded from view. Waterpaw was left alone, back in the hunting grounds of ThunderClan.

"Featherwhisker!" she called out, "Featherwhisker, wait!" But he was too far gone to hear her now.

Waterpaw felt a stab in her belly and she jolted awake. "You were wailing in your sleep," mumbled Graypaw, closing his eyes again. *Did I say any of the words out loud*? She wondered, though she mustn't of. Graypaw would have asked her some questions. He's not one to let go of such knowledge.

Not able to fall back asleep, she got to her paws and padded outside of the apprentices' den and sat down, wrapping her plumbing tail over her front paws. *Use my wits?* She looked up at silverpelt. The moon was almost full, and down for the night as the sun began to peak beyond the trees. She heard some scuffling near the medicine den. Intrigued, she headed inside, surprised to find Spottedleaf awake and going through her supply of herbs. She was hoping it was a mouse hiding somewhere easy enough for her to catch.

"One, two, three, oh, that's not nearly enough." she pawed at a few sprigs of catmint. Waterpaw could smell the mint and it filled her

nostrils as she padded closer to her. "Hello, Waterpaw." Spottedleaf mewed looking up at her, her paw still stretched out as if mid-count.

"I heard you were up is all." Waterpaw confessed, noticing the tansy just beside Spottedleaf. It was tore up into tiny pieces, making their pungent scent spread throughout the den. "Who's the tansy for?"

Spottedleaf sat up straighter, and stared at Waterpaw for a moment in amazement."It's for Halftail." she mewed, though she seemed a bit hesitant to reply.

"Does he have a bad cough? I could give it to him." she offered, heading over to the plant. It smelled strong, but it didn't seem to bother her at all. She lowered her head and sniffed it, breathing in the familiar scents.

"Of course. But how do you know it's for coughs?" Spottedleaf couldn't hide her surprise anymore.

"Featherwhisker. I speak to him in my dreams."

"He," Spottedleaf paused and brushed her paw against the den's floors, "he was my mentor." She looked up at Waterpaw and paused, as if to search for the right words. "You should become a medicine cat. You have such great power and knowledge."

"A medicine cat?" Waterpaw took a step back in shock. "I can't be a medicine cat. I'm already a warrior apprentice."

"I wasn't always a medicine cat." Spottedleaf confessed, "I was training under Thrushpelt at the time." She took a deep breath and gulped down some air, as if to swallow some words she didn't want to share. "I then trained under Featherwhisker. Passing by his den made me fall in love with the herbs."

Waterpaw could tell she was hiding some part of her past, but she didn't push for any more details. "I-I don't know," she stammered, looking back down at the tansy below her feet.

"Being a warrior takes fortitude and power. But being a medicine takes so much more than that." Spottedleaf purred, pushing some of

the tansy closer to Waterpaw. "Go ahead. Halftail will appreciate a young one visiting the den."

Waterpaw took a mouth full of tansy and headed toward the elder's den, following Spottedleaf's orders, remembering how the even the RiverClan leader seemed to have listened to his medicine cat.

Halftail and One-eye were the only ones awake. They were sharing tongues near the entrance. Patchpelt and Speckletail further in the back, curled up and sound asleep. "Oh, that's a new face." purred Halftail, pleased to see such a young cat enter.

She dropped the tansy in front of the old brown tabby tom, "I'm Waterpaw." she bowed her head, introducing herself. "I brought some tansy to help with the cough. I could grab some honey if you like for the taste?" she quickly offered knowing how bitter the herb can be.

"Are you the new medicine cat apprentice? Has Spottedleaf finally taken someone in?" mewed One-eye, her one good yellow eye, wide with curiosity.

Waterpaw suddenly felt hot with embarrassment. Perhaps she knew a bit too much. If she wanted to keep training as a warrior, knowing about the herbs should come to a stop. But the more she thought about it, the more she knew Spottedleaf was right. She didn't know how to hunt to mice, or climb trees to chase squirrels. She didn't know how to fight as graceful as Runningwind was when high up in the air, kicking his feet. Perhaps she was meant for a different path. But could being a medicine cat truly be her calling?

Chapter Six

"Waterpaw," Runningwind called out from outside the apprentice den. Waterpaw blinked open her eyes. Did she go back to sleep? She didn't remember coming back to the den. She looked around, and scrambled to her paws, adjusting to the light coming through the brambles overhanging the entrance. "I spoke with Bluestar, you're going to the Gathering tonight," he finished as Waterpaw made her way out.

"So no training today?" she questioned, almost filled with joy.

"Right. So go ahead and get something from the fresh-kill for the elders and then new moss for their bedding. Then you can grab something for yourself afterwards." He sprinted away towards a group of cats. They headed up the ravine and out the gorse tunnel, speaking in hushed voices, probably discussing on where they are patrolling. Waterpaw headed to the fresh-kill pile and picked out a few plump mice and a chaffinch for the elders. Carrying them all, and feeling rather proud of herself, she bounded towards the large rock formation, with a ledge letting the elders sun bathe up on top. She crouched down and crawled into the den, still all four juicy mouthfuls caught her jaws.

"That was when I lost my eye, do you remember that, Speckletail?

"Oh of course. Though I'm sure that badger thought twice before ever returning to ThunderClan." the old she-cat purred, then turned to see Waterpaw at the entrance, who was still crouched low to the ground. "Oh, hello."

"I'm Waterpaw." she introduced herself, dropping the fresh-kill below her feet.

"Thank you young one, but please you should eat before us." It was Dappletail who meowed this time. She was further in the back of the den. Waterpaw didn't even see or know she was back there. She had only brought four pieces of prey, not five.

"Thank you, but I insist." Waterpaw saw how skinny One-eye and Dappletail truly were. They were just skin, with each of their ribs poking through. She put the plumpest in front of One-eye first. "Eat."

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The full moon rose high above the trees, casting long blue shadows across the camp. Waterpaw was excited. She's heard about the Gathering. It was some magical time where all four Clans could share tongues and stories in truce. Perhaps she could even meet a friend. She waited in the clearing alongside Runningwind, Firepaw, Graypaw, Darkstripe, Longtail, Tigerclaw, Whitestorm and Bluestar. Bluestar laid on top of the highrock, legs crossed. They waited a few extra moments for the last warrior to show. It was Ravenpaw, Tigerclaw's apprentice. Waterpaw saw the normally cowering apprentice held his head and tail high for the first time.

"Let's go, we mustn't keep them waiting." Bluestar leaped off the ledge and led the way out. Waterpaw followed behind Whitestorm. The huge white warrior carried himself with pride. Bluestar then stopped near a large trunk which had fallen over a river. "Cross carefully," she reminded Tigerclaw as she let him lead the way. Tigerclaw dug into the wood as he walked across, flicking his tail and others followed close behind. It was snow Waterpaw's turn. She gulped, and looked down, noticing how high they truly were from the water.

"Don't look down, Waterpaw!" hissed Runningwind, "just keep walking."

Finally making it to the other side, she felt relieved to be on flat grounds again. Bluestar was last to cross, then led the way up a steep slope. She reached the top and halted, looking down on the four trees surrounding a clowder of cats. Waterpaw stared in amazement. It was nothing like she'd ever seen. This place was made for the Clans. Waterpaw couldn't wait to head down there and meet some of the others. This was the first time she ventured out past ThunderClan territory.

"It seems rather small this time around," meowed Whitestorm as he

studied the clearing.

"WindClan has yet to come." Bluestar replied, her mouth still open from tasting the air. "Let's go."

Waterpaw raced down after her mentor, who immediately veered off to the left towards some RiverClan warriors. Waterpaw recognized Crookedstar sitting above them on the high rock, his tooth hanging out from his crooked jaws.

Mistypaw, the cat she ran into some time ago, was also here, her gray pelt shining blue from the full moon. For a moment, Waterpaw thought it was Bluestar in the distance. The resemblance was remarkable. Staring a little longer, she suddenly noticed Mistypaw's gaze drift to her and they locked eyes for a split second. Waterpaw quickly looked away, in hopes it didn't make anything awkward, though she was sure it did.

"How is RiverClan? Is leaf-fall treating you well?" Runningwind purred, touching his cheek to an older gray tom.

"Leaf-bare is among us soon." He looked up at silverpelt, his pale blue eyes sparkling as he continued, "but fish are running well enough."

Waterpaw guessed he wasn't being entirely truthful. All the warriors seemed afraid of what it is come for leaf-bare.

"Lily, it's good to see you," purred a familiar voice a few tail-lengths behind her. She looked back, recognizing the brown tom from RiverClan, Mudfur. He was the RiverClan medicine cat. "I can assume you found Bluestar?"

"Oh, I did, thank you." She dipped her head to the old tom, "I'm Waterpaw now."

"Waterpaw." Mudfur repeated her name. "Have you seen all of Fourtrees yet?" Waterpaw shook her head, and Mudfur continued, "Well then, come on. You've got to at least explore a bit. It's an island, so you can't get lost."

Waterpaw glanced over at Runningwind who was still talking to the

old gray tom. He seemed busy, so she didn't dare interrupt him. Besides, there's a truce here. What could happen?

"That over there is RiverClan. We swim here. Pretty easy." He confessed, pointing with his muzzle down by the water's edge. He then flicked his tail to the opposite way, "and over there is where WindClan will come." He stared out into the distance as if waiting for one of the WindClan cats to show before finally turning back to Waterpaw.

A yowl came from above the trees, and startled Waterpaw, making her jump, "Let us get started!"

"WindClan hasn't shown yet." Shouted a queen from the crowd of cats. Waterpaw guessed she was from RiverClan from the way her pelt shimmered in the moonlight, showing almost every droplet clinging on.

"WindClan will not come." It was Brokenstar who replied, his voice pierced through the cats, and a ripple of shock waved through them.

"What do you mean?" meowed a she-cat.

"Where are they?" This time, Waterpaw recognized the white tom's voice, Whitestorm.

"We have driven them out. They are weak." hissed Brokenstar. He took a step forward and puffed out his chest as he continued to speak, "Crookedstar has agreed to let us take the river and part of their territory. Bluestar," he looked over at the pale blue leader, his eyes blazing like fire, "We have many mouths to feed. Leaf-bare is on its way, and our territory can't hold us all."

"I will not give up ThunderClan's territory for your hunting parties." hissed Bluestar, keeping her gaze fixated on his narrowed eyes.

"Would you be so cruel to let our kits starve?"

Bluestar hesitated for a moment, as to be thinking of the right reply. "My answer still stands." Her voice was suddenly cold, and daring. Could there really be a fight when there's supposed to be a truce?

Waterpaw's eyes widened, not knowing how the leader would react.

Brokenstar rose up on his haunches, but stayed where he was, "I do not expect an answer now." He meowed, "Think it over." He finished, then leaped off the high rock and led his Clan away from Fourtrees.

Bluestar led her Clan up the hill and back towards the fallen tree. Waterpaw followed in silence behind her mentor, Runningwind. Just as she stepped onto the patch of grass leading up the ravine, Waterpaw could feel someone staring at her. No, staring through her. She glanced over to the side, afraid of who the cat might be. She recognized the pungent scent of ShadowClan. There, was a pair of piercing blue eyes looking straight at her.

Chapter Seven

She knew no one who was as dark as the tom across the clearing. He was a ShadowClan cat. She knew by his scent; it's as if the monster's huge black paws raked against the thunderpath. She scrunched her nose in disgust, but it soon faded as the blue eyes suddenly relaxed and now filled with compassion.

Confusion raced through Waterpaw. Who could this cat be and why was he staring, let alone staring *at* her.

"Waterpaw, you coming?" Runningwind meowed, who was already a few fox-lengths away.

Waterpaw shook her head to clear it then scampered after Runningwind as they raced up the hill and out of sight. She was relieved to get up the hill. Though a sense of something else — something she could not point out — lapped at her paws.

Returning to camp, the warriors murmured with hushed voices, gradually getting louder as the others came out of the dens from the commotion.

"I guess there's no need to call a meeting." meowed Bluestar as she heaved herself up on the highrock.

"Lionheart, we need more patrols along the border. Double them. Get a patrol ready for dawn. We can't risk them hunting in our grounds. Not when it's this close to leaf-bare."

"What happened?" asked a queen, emerging from the nursery.

"Brokenstar is what happened." hissed Mousefur, her voice came in harsh.

"Brokenstar has taken over the river in RiverClan." Bluestar replied, lashing her tail for silence amongst the crowd, all cats now out in the clearing, "With WindClan gone, they'll take their territory too."

she continued.

"We could hunt in those territories." It was Longtail who stepped forward and spoke. His eyes blazing like fire with satisfaction.

"No." Bluestar hissed, "We will bring back WindClan. There were four Clans before, there will be four Clans now." She paused and scanned the clearing. "Firepaw, Graypaw, come." She flicked her tail, then headed back towards her den. Firepaw and Graypaw exchanged weary glances with one another before following her into the den, while the others dispersed back to their nests for the night.

Waterpaw heard the soft murmurs of Bluestar above her, "Find WindClan." she heard her say as she swiftly passed by and ran into the apprentice den. The blue eyes still daunted her. He seemed almost kind, but that couldn't be it. Could it?

Firepaw and Graypaw trotted past the entrance and ran into the medicine den to see Spottedleaf, who was sorting her herbs as usual.

She barely noticed them until Sandpaw and Dustpaw came into the den quarreling who was better at hunting squirrel. She rolled her eyes, and looked the other way as she curled herself, placing her fluffy tail over front paws, ready for sleep. Though sleep didn't seem to come. She stayed staring at the tight curls of brambles lacing overhead.

Waterpaw felt a bit of relief as she stepped out of the den, and sat down, looking up at the night sky. It was lined with stars as bright as the moon. Some wind caught in her fur, making a chill run down to her bones. Leaf-bare was definitely on its way soon. She shivered, and shook out her thick fur, as another gust of wind took flight. She could sense the camp was still asleep, and had quite a bit of ways till dawn.

She heard some shuffling near the medicine den, and she immediately crouched down low. Must be a mouse. And she was going to catch it.

She crept low to the ground, keeping her ears and tail still, listening for more rustling noises. She stopped at the entrance. Moss hung over the stone walls, flowers clinging to some of the tendrils. Something stirred inside the medicine den. She peered inside, looking over in the corner, only to find Spottedleaf sweeping up some herbs.

"What are you doing?" Waterpaw mewed softly, realizing Spottedleaf probably already knew she was here by her scent.

Spottedleaf kept her paw moving as she spoke, "I'm sweeping away the extra bits I don't want. I like to push them out back." She then looked up at Waterpaw, suddenly amazed she was still awake. "Can't sleep?"

Waterpaw shook her head slowly, "No. Was that horsetail?" She remembered it used to grow near her twoleg's garden.

"Yes," Spottedleaf sounded astonished, though Waterpaw didn't know why. She knew about her knowledge of herbs.

"I want to train as a medicine cat." Waterpaw blurted out.

"I was hoping you would." Spottedleaf purred. "Have you told Runningwind yet?"

"No. I'll tell him when he wakes. Will he accept the change in role? Did Thrustpelt?"

Spottedleaf pulled back her ears, "Of course. He was okay with it. Runningwind will understand your choice."

Waterpaw waited till dawn broke over the trees, and warriors began to emerge from their dens. Tigerclaw stretched out his limbs, and yawned, flexing his long talons. Whitestorm, Longtail, then Willowpelt came out after him, shaking out their pelts one by one as they set out into the clearing. "I'll go around the ShadowClan borders," Tigerclaw ordered, "with Longtail." he pointed with his tail to the yellow tom. "You and Willowpelt, go around the RiverClan border. We can cut half the day that way." He then looked around, craning his neck to see inside the apprentice den.

"Where is Ravenpaw." he growled.

As if summoned by his voice, Ravenpaw emerged from the den, his body trembling. Waterpaw couldn't tell if he was trembling from the cold, or the fact he was terrified of his own mentor. Did Ravenpaw know something more? She was eager to speak with him, but thought it would probably be best to try later tonight when he gets back. She wouldn't want to keep the deputy waiting much longer. They headed up the ravine and out the gorse tunnel in a matter of seconds, leaving the clearing empty for a few more moments, until Runningwind, Mousefur and Darkstripe stepped out into the sun.

The morning dew dried as the sun rose a little higher in the sky. Runningwind padded over to Waterpaw, his head and tail held high as always. Waterpaw felt a knot tighten in her stomach. She swallowed hard, suddenly not able to talk.

Runningwind must have sensed something was off. He sat down, and tilted his head slightly to the side, his eyes filled with curiosity. "Waterpaw?"

"I-I want to train as a medicine cat." she stammered.

Runningwind showed no signs of emotions. Waterpaw couldn't tell if he was angry, or sad. "Of course," he meowed, "I think just time and patience would have helped, but if you're sure?"

Waterpaw didn't hesitate, "I'm better at hunting herbs than I am at mice. I am sure of this." She knew time and patience would not have helped her. Spottedleaf was right, she was destined to be a medicine cat.

Chapter Eight

Waking up from the medicine den was different for a change. Seeing the moss hanging over the edge on the inside seemed rather pretty. It shined a pale gold in the sunlight. Spottedleaf was up early, already tiding up the den. Everything had to be neat. Not that Waterpaw was complaining, she does like it to be organized. But it's always one tedious chore after another. She didn't know how Spottedleaf could ever sleep — if she ever did.

"We're out of yarrow, and chervil. Waterpaw, could you get them?" she meowed, turning to meet Waterpaw's eyes as she blinked them awake.

"Yeah." Waterpaw quickly padded outside of the medicine, then turned to face her mentor, "It's found near the old thunderpath, right?" That's near ShadowClan territory. Was it wise to send an apprentice there alone?

"Yes, you'll find it on the side near the burnt sycamores." Spottedleaf didn't seem worried at all. She kept on with her counting, pawing each leaf to the side.

"B-but, that's near ShadowClan territory. We're not exactly on best terms with them." she reminded her.

"You can go with the patrol that's about to head out." Spottedleaf flicked her tail.

Dustpaw, Darkstripe, Sandpaw and her mentor Whitestorm stood in the middle of the clearing. Waterpaw quickly made her way to them before they dispersed up the ravine. "Waterpaw?" It was Whitestorm who noticed her first.

"I'm coming to collect some herbs near the old thunderpath." she told him, scanning the others for any signs of hostility. But to her surprise, they seemed to have accepted her. Whitestorm dipped his head, then followed Tigerclaw out the gorse tunnel, with Sandpaw,

and Dustpaw at his heels. She ran after them, not wanting to see if Darkstripe would let her pass or not. He was one of the warriors that didn't like kittypets joining the Clans. He didn't say anything, but she could still feel some sort of tension was between them.

"We're almost to the thunderpath." Whitestorm told her, as they neared the massive sycamore trees overhanging above them. It stretched far beyond the forest canopy. Its roots snaked and intertwined with moss. She knew where they were. She had no idea why he was telling her. It's not like she was blind. She scanned around her, jaws open, tasting the air. Yarrow had a pungent smell, so detecting something like this should be easy.

There! She smelled it at last, growing just across the clearing. "I'll go get some yarrow over there." she meowed in a hushed voice, knowing they were near ShadowClan territory. Just across the thunderpath, it all belonged to them. With Brokenstar wanting more territory to hunt, who knows what will happen. Though Waterpaw hoped it wouldn't come to that. She couldn't battle. Not now.

She headed to the tree which grew the yarrow, the tiny white flowers all tucked together in one clump. She chewed off the stems, careful not to crush the petals. Holding them tight in her jaws, she turned to join the rest of her Clanmates.

"Psst," meowed a small voice from behind Waterpaw. Waterpaw turned slowly. Was she caught by a ShadowClan warrior? A small brown tom, with patches of white on his muzzle and chest stood before her across the thunderpath. He was crouched low to the ground, tall grass surrounded him, almost hiding his swirled tabby markings.

"Wh-who are you?" Waterpaw stammered.

"Littlepaw." he quickly whispered, "I remember you from the Gathering." Waterpaw remembered him as well. His blue eyes staring back at her made her a feel a bit uneasy, but his voice was somehow calming. "I'm sorry about Brokentail. To be honest, some of us don't really believe him. We just follow because we're loyal to ShadowClan." he confessed.

Waterpaw was astonished. Why was he telling her this? If he was so loyal to ShadowClan, why would he tell a ThunderClan a secret like that? Before she could reply, Whitestorm called after her, "Waterpaw, what's taking so long?"

"Sorry, just found some, on my way up." she called, not taking her eyes off Littlepaw. "That's quite the secret you got there." she whispered, jokingly, "it's safe with me." she finished, then darted up the small hill and into the trees. She weaved through them, her head filled with questions on why he would tell her this. Something in him, she couldn't shake off. It was some thing she hadn't experienced before. It made her heart thud faster as she got back to camp, and almost ran into Sandpaw on her way to the medicine den.

"Watch it, kittypet." Sandpaw hissed as she nearly missed her.

Waterpaw felt stung by her words of being called a kittypet, but that faded quickly as she dropped the yarrow at her paws. Spottedleaf looked up from her counting, and stared at the flowers for a second, then up at Waterpaw, "Where's the chervil?"

She completely forgot about the chervil roots. They were sitting just across the yarrow next to the nearby tree; she missed it because of Littlepaw. His mouse-brained words kept her mind too busy to think about grabbing them too. "I forgot." she meowed, pulling back her ears.

Spottedleaf slightly narrowed her eyes, as if she didn't believe Waterpaw. It wasn't like Waterpaw to forget her herbs. "Never mind, we can get those later. You can start by chewing off the stems and petals and put them into piles over there."

There was a small stoned shelf with herbs laying acorss it. Herbs of all kinds, poppyseeds, feverfew, coltsfoot, dock, fennel, just to name a few,; it filled her nostrils, bringing her back to the medicine den. She started to chew off the stems, at first, careful not to ruin to the whole flower, but as she kept on thinking about those soft blue eyes, she began to carelessly tear through the petals making her two piles rather messy.

Spottedleaf looked over and lashed her tail, "Waterpaw," a growl rumbled through her throat, "you're more distracted than a fox in a rabbit warren. Pay attention to what you're doing. Your piles are colliding. For great StarClan, at least look at what you're doing."

Waterpaw didn't know Spottedleaf could sound so upset. Hot with embarrassment, she lowered her head and tidied the two piles, separating them neatly with her paws. Waterpaw could feel Spottedleaf's eyes still on her, as if she thought perhaps she would go back into her daydream. Or if she was actually reading Waterpaw 's thoughts, knowing all along the dirty secret Littlepaw had told her.

Chapter Nine

Spottedleaf wrapped up the last bit of the herbs and tucked the leaves into the bundle. "There, all ready. Let's go, Waterpaw. The moon won't wait for us." she called out to her apprentice who was clearly not ready.

Waterpaw was fidgeting with the borage they were ripping up earlier this morning. The wind took a ahold of it, making them swirl about the den. She was picking up the smaller pieces Spottedleaf had missed. "Okay, okay, I'm coming." she murmured, tucking in the last of it. She turned then dashed after Spottedleaf.

"We'll head up here by the old thunderpath. It's an easier route than going through RiverClan." Spottedleaf trekked along the edge of a winding path through the thick oak trees.

"You mean go through ShadowClan territory? But aren't they hostile towards us?" Waterpaw couldn't face the fact that she could also see Littlepaw.

"We are going to the Moonstone. They can't stop medicine cats from traveling during half moon. Even Yellowfang is travelling. We might even run into her on the way if we hurry." Spottedleaf went on, avoiding every fallen stick blocking by the path by jumping over them with eaze.

Waterpaw had to heave herself up. She was still a young apprentice afterall and didn't have the extra practice Spottedleaf had. If she even got there.

"We're near the thunderpath. There aren't many monsters now, but we still have to be careful." Spottedleaf slowed down as they neared the loud sounds of growls and powerful fumes coming from the black earth.

Waterpaw padded closer to Spottedleaf, feeling a bit uneasy as she thought about crossing. "We have to cross this?" Suddenly the

thunderpath looked huge. It didn't look this big last time she was here. She could see Littlepaw so clearly. She gulped, not ready to cross such a large way where monsters come rushing by.

"Come on, just run fast and don't look back." Spottedleaf nudged Waterpaw along, making her sprint across the thunderpath. She went as fast as her legs could carry her, wanting to collapse moments before reaching the other side. She panted hard, holding herself steady on the tall grass, safely in ShadowClan territory.

Spottedleaf, right behind her, made it just in time as a monster roared past her. Waterpaw knew of the them. Her twolegs had gone inside their bellies and let it take them places. She was not fond of the awful stench and cries it made, especially at night with its glowing yellow eyes.

Waterpaw shot a worried glance at Spottedleaf; she looked as if she just finished a long fight with RiverClan.

"Don't worry about me." mewed Spottedleaf, noticing Waterpaw 's gaze, "I'm okay."

Waterpaw wasn't entirely convinced she was telling the truth, but she followed as Spottedleaf led the way through ShadowClan territory. She stopped when a patrol padded toward them, their tails held high in the air. "What are you doing on ShadowClan territory?" hissed a tom. Waterpaw didn't know who the tom was. His black pelt almost blending in with the darkness of the moon, shimmering with a glint of silver as he stepped into the light.

"It's half-moon," retorted Spottedleaf, narrowing her amber eyes, "or did you happen to forget that we're medicine cats?" she added with a hiss, bristling her neck fur in anger. Was she going to fight the tom? Waterpaw didn't think Spottedleaf would be much of a fighter, but she was not afraid to say what she wanted. Waterpaw envyed that. She hoped to one day be as strong as her.

"Just because you're..."

"Nightpelt, no more. We have to let them pass." A white tom with huge black paws padded in between the two cats, eyes blazing like

fire at the ShadowClan warrior.

"Thank you, Blackfoot." Spottedleaf dipped her head and blinked her thanks to the deputy, then brushed past them, giving the black tom a solid glare before racing up a steep hill. "Up there," she explained in between breaths as she sprinted, "we'll be able to see Mothermouth."

Waterpaw, hot on her heels, pricked her ears. She was happy to be almost there. Her feet ached, but the thought of seeing the Moonstone for herself was even greater. Her excitement swelled up inside her, her steps becoming lighter as mouthermough finally came into view. "Wow." Was all she could say. Though it was dark, she could see the mountain, and the dark cave within. Featherwhisker had told her about the tunnel, and making his way through with only his whiskers in the darkness.

The two other medicine cats were already there waiting for them. Spottedleaf greeted them both with a purr and rubbed her cheek with theirs. "This is my new apprentice, Waterpaw." she meowed, flicking her tail toward her apprentice.

Waterpaw dipped her head, her heart pounding with excitement. "I'm Yellowfang," replied a gray she-cat, her meow was hoarse and cracked with age. Her muzzle laid flat against her face and her eyes were round and yellow.

"Waterpaw, it's good to see you again." purred the brown tom. Waterpaw recognized him immediately. It was Mudfur, the RiverClan medicine cat. He had saved her from when she fell into the gorge coming to find Bluestar. Seeing Mudfur again reminded her of the tom who had brought her into ThunderClan, Oakheart. She remembered Tigerclaw killing him, making her feel a sudden pang of sadness.

"It's good to see you too." she finally meowed, realizing she was taking far too long to reply.

"Well come on, we don't have much time. The moon isn't going to wait." hissed Yellowfang, turning and padding into the dark cave. Mudfur followed behind without a word, obviously agreeing with

the old she-cat. Waterpaw then trekked after him, Spottedleaf close beside her until they reached the cave. It was so narrow, they had to go in a single-file line.

Darkness took over Waterpaw's senses. She couldn't see a thing. Featherwhisker was right, all she could do was rely on her other senses. She closed her eyes and focused on only what she smelled. Opening her jaws to taste the air, she could sense Mudfur was not too far ahead of her, moving along at a fairly quick pace. Waterpaw relied more on her whiskers, letting them guide her through the long tunnel. Just as she thought they'd never reach the end, light beamed above them.

Yellowfang weaved her way through some rocks, then settled near the Moonstone, a tail-length away, waiting for Spottedleaf to announce her apprentice. Mudfur sat down next to Yellowfang, wrapping his tail over his front paws.

Waterpaw gaped open her mouth in amazment and the sheer size of what laid inside the mountain. Blue light shined across the ceiling, with crystal-like pillars coming down and into the earth. The Moonstone, brighter than the sun lit up the cave, making Waterpaw feel blinded.

"Waterpaw is it your wish to enter the mysteries of StarClan as a medicine cat?" Spottedleaf asked, looking over her shoulder at Waterpaw who was sitting behind her.

"It is." she replied, almost bursting with excitement. She already knew she could speak with StarClan, but meeting some of the other ancestors would be quite amazing. *Imagine if I met Thunderstar*. She thought to herself.

"Warriors of StarClan, I present you this apprentice. She has chosen the path of a medicine cat. Grant her your wisdom and insight so she may understand your ways and heal her Clan in accordance with your will," Spottedleaf meowed, raising her head and staring out into the distance as if a StarClan cat was standing there, watching. But Waterpaw saw nothing. Even after Spottedleaf said those words, not one warrior stepped forward. Where were the StarClan cats?

"Touch your nose to the stone and close your eyes." Spottedleaf whispered in her ear, beckoning with her tail, and giving her a little shove with her muzzle.

Waterpaw padded up to the stone. She could feel the cold forming into a cloud around her as she neared it. Fluffing out her fur, she laid down and rested her muzzle, touching her nose to the Moonstone and closed her eyes. She could hear the other medicine cats around her settling in and tucking in their paws for sleep.

Stars swirled around her, the ground vanishing and she felt as though the earth had swallowed her up. She wanted to cry for help, but she almost felt too dizzy, then tumbled onto the soft grass. "Oof." she meowed, finally stopping just before she hit a tree.

Was it supposed to be that rough? She thought, but quickly brushed it off when she recognized ThunderClan scent. *Am I dreaming just a normal dream? Am I not meant to be a medicine cat after all*?

She glanced around, desperately trying to find a StarClan cat. Any StarClan cat. Where did they all go? She padded further up the path, and stopped when she saw a pile of bones. Blood filled her nostrils, making her gasp in shock and horror. The bones bursted into flames, making Waterpaw jump backwards. She watched, her eyes round with fear as the fire rose higher.

"Fire alone will save the Clans." meowed several cats at once. Waterpaw had to strain her ears as they repeated the words, as it echoed through the trees, "Fire alone will save the Clans."

Featherwhisker had mentioned something like this before. "What do you mean?" she called out hoping someone would come out and talk to her.

But she was met with only silence, and she was woken up by a jab in her side, "Waterpaw, wake up."

Chapter Ten

Waterpaw blinked open her eyes, still dazed from the dream she recieved. Had they really slept for that long? The others also seemed concerned, as if they too, knew something was up. "I think we can all assume we had the same dream?" meowed Yellowfang, stepping forward, and twitching her tail nervously.

"Yes," Spottedleaf replied, "we should get back to our Clans then."

Waterpaw icthed to speak about it with her mentor, but she remembered Spottedleaf telling her they musnt't speak of what happened. But wouldn't this be important enough to talk about? Spottedleaf trotted back up the hill, Waterpaw and Yellowfang behind her. Waterpaw felt her shoulders bristle as the wind picked up.

Finally making it back to the entrance to camp, Spottedleaf began to run. Waterpaw, confused, raced after her and ducked in the gorse tunnel, then stopped as she saw ThunderClan was under attack! But by who, Waterpaw didn't know. There were too many pelts flying past her for her to be sure. Spottedleaf sprung into battle, gracefully twisting high in the air avoiding the angry claws of a brown she-cat.

Waterpaw raced through the fleeing pelts as they attacked one another, claws slashing and cats screeching in agony. Heading for the medicine den, she ran faster, but then felt her side get pushed and she pummeled into a brown tom with white around his muzzle and chest. She scrambled to her paws, still dazed from being thrown across the clearing. Steadying her paws, she digged her claws into the ground and faced the warrior who had knocked her down her moments ago.

Standing there, the brown and white tom stared down at her, claws unsheathed. Waterpaw gasped. She knew this tom. She remembered those blue eyes looking back at her at the end of the Gathering. And again when she went to get the yarrow. *Could it really be him? Did he actually want to hurt me?* Waterpaw thought, her heart pounding

as if it was going to leap right out of her chest.

He raced toward her. Waterpaw barely had any time to react, and she was pinned to the ground, eyes wide with shock and panic. "Y-you're that cat from the Gathering." he whispered, his eyes widening as if he had suddenly realized who she was. "I'm Littlepaw," he meowed a little louder, letting Waterpaw scramble to her paws again.

"I'm Waterpaw," she panted, shaking off the moss that stuck to her pelt. "I'm a medicine cat," she finished with a hiss. She pushed past him and headed for the medicine den, moss still clinging to the side of her leg. Littlepaw let her go, watching her in silence.

"Littlepaw, what are you doing?" growled a brown tom. He slashed the apprentice's cheek, making him jump back into battle with the ThunderClan warriors. Did he see him let her go? Waterpaw could only watch in horror as more pelts flew around the camp. She lost track of Spottedleaf and could only slink back further into the saftey of the stone walls.

"ShadowClan retreat!" yowled the deputy, Blackfoot. His huge jet black paws pounded through the trees, leading his Clan back to where they belonged.

For a moment, Waterpaw thought the battle would have never ended. She was certainly glad it did, though looking around, her Clan was left battered and bruised. Spottedleaf came into view, small tufts of fur missing from her beautiful tortioseshell and white pelt, but her amber eyes were bright and filled with spirit. "Come on, let's treat these wounds." she meowed, finishing with a slight purr.

Waterpaw knew she was an aprentice before becoming a medicine cat, but for how long? She seemed to have forgotten she was a medicine cat. What if Spottedleaf had gotten hurt? Waterpaw shook her head, not able to think about such things. She couldn't imagine being without her. She still had much to learn.

She padded after Spottedleaf and treated the injured cats. They worked together as a team — Waterpaw grabbed the herbs they

needed while Spottedleaf chewed the marigold into a poultice she had pulled out when she went to fetch her apprentice. "Once you get the dandelion," meowed Spottedleaf, "chew off the stems, but keep them there in the den. We might need those later. Bee stings are more common than you think."

Waterpaw nodded then headed back for the den, finding it quickly. It sat near the dock leaves, at the edge of a rock which they used as small shelf. Spottedleaf kept the herbs neat and tidy, everything in its place. Waterpaw had no trouble to ever find an herb in the store. She chewed off the stems and tucked them back in the corner where the others were. There was a pawful of them there already. She trekked back to Spottedleaf, the dandelion petals locked in her jaws.

"Chew that into a poultice and then apply it to Whitestorm and Longtail. I can get him over there." Spottedleaf ordered, as she chewed more of the marigold, then trotted over to the deputy, Lionheart who was lying motionless on the ground.

"Can you stop the bleeding?" cried a white she-cat, her voice carrying over the camp.

Waterpaw continued to chew the petals, trying not to worry if Spottedleaf needed her help. She said to tend to Whitestorm and Longtail. Though she wasn't too fond of the yellow tabby tom. He didn't like her when she first arrived. And she had heard about Firepaw's fight with him. They said he fought well for a kittypet, but Waterpaw knew she couldn't fight him if he tried to do the same with her. She had no collar for him to hold onto. She spat the poultice onto Whitestorm's shoulder. The scratch was deep, but the bleeding had dried sometime during the battle. He winced, but Waterpaw kept calm and she wiped her paw down his shoulder, making sure the scratch had enough juice to cover the whole thing.

"I put some burrs on your scratch to keep the stickiness from spreading around the camp." mewed Waterpaw, feeling satisfied with the work she had done.

"Thanks." purred Whitestorm, licking his chest fur.

"Here, eat some of this thyme. It'll help calm any nerves." Waterpaw pushed over a little pile of shriveled thyme.

"No, I'm okay." Whitestorm reassured her and he leaped off, without another word, not letting Waterpaw tell him he should at least rest for a bit before going on a patrol. She looked over at Longtail, who was sitting there waiting for her. She gulped, not really wanting to treat the warrior. But she couldn't let him see she was afraid, so she held her head and tail high as she padded toward him.

Once she got closer, she could see he had a few scratches on his legs, and tufts of fur missing from his chest and flank. Only a bit of blood still clinged to the wound on his leg, still wet and glistening. Waterpaw began chewing some goldenrod she brought over in her jaws, leaving a small pile of the dandelion back where she treated Whitestorm.

She applied the poultice onto the bleeding wound. Longtail winced, and let out a loud hiss. "Sorry," mewed Waterpaw, though she kept her paw a hold onto him, in case he tried to get away. He laid down, still hissing with feiry and pain and she brushed more onto the other gashes on his leg, suddenly noticing how hard she was rubbing it on — her mind on the bright blue eyes staring down at her.

Chapter Eleven

"No!" wailed the white queen standing in the middle of the clearing. The deputy, Lionheart, still laid motionless beneath her and Spottedleaf. Waterpaw, now done with Longtail, glanced over her shoulder. Was he dead? Waterpaw gasped. Did Tigerclaw plan this? A knot rose in Waterpaw's chest as she thought of Tigerclaw planning the attack. She gulped, feeling her lungs swell up inside her.

"Lionheart, please!" The white she-cat wailed again, but she was only met with silence. Bluestar padded up to the dead deputy, her eyes narrowed and filled with grief and pain. She has lost so much already. Losing Redtail, and now Lionheart; Waterpaw couldn't imagine what her leader was going through.

Spottedleaf and Frostfur stepped to the side as Bluestar laid down next to him, resting her graying muzzle on his flank. She laid there for a long time. Dawn broke, the sun peeking through the trees, casting long shadows across the camp.

"I say these words before the spirit of Lionheart, that he may hear and approve of my choice. Tigerclaw, is the deputy of ThunderClan." she meowed, raising her head up in the air as if speaking directly to StarClan herself.

No! Waterpaw wanted to wail like a lost kit in the river, but she kept herself steady by digging her claws into the soft ground, still a mush from the morning dew.

"I humbly accept." meowed Tigerclaw, dipping his head.

Empty words! She breathed to herself. Waterpaw searched for any signs of satisfaction, but she couldn't read any of his emotions. Was he hiding them on purpose? Waterpaw was sure of it. *Of course he's hiding them*. She thought to bitterly to herself. She raked her claws against the dirt below her. *If he sneered in satisfaction now, Bluestar wouldn't have chosen him. That's been his plan all along.*

Graypaw, who was now back from retrieving WindClan, padded up to him and pressed his nose against his former mentor's belly. He closed his eyes, pressing harder as others gathered around him to say goodbye to their deputy one last time. Bluestar heaved herself up onto the highrock, her tail dragging behind her and her ears laid flat against her head as she spoke, "Lionheart was Graypaw's mentor. Tigerclaw, you will take over Graypaw's training."

Two apprentices? Is that even possible? Tigerclaw didn't seem phased, and no emotions could be read from the new deputy. Waterpaw narrowed her eyes, and slunk back into the medicine den, trying to ignore the urge to claw him herself.

"Waterpaw," meowed Spottedleaf as she made her way to the entrance, "don't you want to say goodbye?"

Waterpaw gulped. Was she supposed to—even if she didn't know who the warrior really was? She's only spoken to him a pawful of times. He was one of the nicer warriors when she first joined; he sounded kind and had a warming heart. She didn't say goodbye to Redtail. Runningwind didn't say anything about *actually* having to. "Should I?" she finally responded, "I barely know him."

Spottedleaf closed her eyes for a mere second, dipping her head, "You'd only be paying your respects."

Waterpaw thought about it for a moment, twitching just the tip of her tail. She was right. He was also her elder, despite him being one of the younger warriors. Waterpaw brushed past Spottedlead and padded up to the old deputy. His limp body laid in a pool of blood, which had all poured out from a huge slash on his neck. Multiple by the looks of it. Her fur was now covered in his own blood, staining his once beautiful golden pelt. Waterpaw felt her stomach churn—the stench alone from the dried blood could make anyone sick, yet no other warrior seemed bothered by the smell. She pressed her forehead against his flank, "May you rise in StarClan my friend. Perhaps we will cross paths again." she whispered, then backed away slowly, watching, hoping that maybe they were wrong. Maybe he was still alive and breathing. Maybe this was all just a bad dream. Maybe she didn't really wake up from the Moonstone.

But she wasn't dreaming. It was all real. She closed her eyes and shook her head, then padded back to the medicine den washing away any thoughts about what she saw. The elders were to bury him now, though Waterpaw couldn't imagine it would be easy for them. Spottedleaf went to help them, not bothered by the pool of blood that stained her white paws as they dragged him away.

The sun was now high in the sky, though clouds overhung, dark and gray. Rain was on its way. Perhaps it was a good thing—it would clean up the red-stained grass. Waterpaw glanced at the stock of herbs they had. If it was to rain, she wanted to be prepared. But when she looked, they were wiped almost clean. There was no more marigold, no more dandelion, no more tansy, no more horsetail, no more comfrey and no more cobwebs. If ShadowClan was to attack again, half of their warriors could die!

"We're out of so much." she mewed out loud, not realizing Spottedleaf padding up behind her.

"Our Clan needed it. Though we won this time around, they will need a lot of time to heal. But ShadowClan might not wait that long." Spottedleaf padded around Waterpaw following her gaze and seeing the empty shelves.

A bit startled, but not enough to make her jump, Waterpaw looked at her mentor. She was still stained with blood around her paws, legs and jaws. As of she caught a piece of squirrel and ate it for herself, then forgetting to clean herself up. As if reading Waterpaw's mind, she headed to the small pool they had in the back of the den and began to dip her paws in and washing herself with grace.

"Should we go and restock then?" Waterpaw mewed, turning her head back to the herbs.

"Yes, let's split up. We can cover more ground that way." Spottedleaf agreed in between licks.

Once Spottedleag was all washed up and clean once again, she headed for the entrance. Waterpaw was amazed at how the Clans could just go back to their daily lives after the death of a Clan member. Though everyone still seemed to keep her tails down, their

spirits were held high. She padded after Spottedleaf up the ravine and ducked out the gorse tunnel. "You can head toward the Great Sycamore and get some horsetail, then go down to Snake Rocks, get the cobweb. I can see what I find in Sunningrocks and the Owl Tree." she ordered.

Waterpaw stopped in her tracks. The Great Sycamore. The same Great Sycamore that was near ShadowClan territory—near Littlepaw, the ShadowClan apprentice? Did Spottedleaf mean to do this? Why was she always sent to over there? She wanted to protest, but she held her tongue, then continued to head toward The Great Sycamore just as Spottedleaf had said.

Chapter Twelve

Waterpaw took a deep breath in, taking in all the different herbs they had now restocked within the next few days. She had been able to find the herbs easily—thankful she didn't run into Littlepaw. He had distracted her once. She couldn't be distracted by those pericing blue eyes again. She had to keep her focus on the herbs. Messing up could mean failing her Clanmates. Failing her mentor.

"Come on, Waterpaw. The Gathering will be starting soon." mewed Spottedleaf, brushing her tail across Waterpaw's flank.

Waterpaw was excited. This was her first Gathering as medicne cat, which meant she would be sitting with the other Clan's medicine cats. She's met them before, but she was most excited about Mudfur. He was so kind to her the first day they met. She wouldn never forget what he did and she hoped to repay him one day. She followed Spottedleaf into the clearing. Tigerclaw stood on the highrock beside Bluestar, towering over her with his sheer size and muscles. Longtail, Whitestorm, Mousefur and Willowpelt were sitting just below, all sharing tongues with one another with hushes whispers. Firepaw and Graypaw padded up behind them.

"Do you think WindClan will be there?" Waterpaw heard Mousefur ask as they neared the fallen tree leading to the island.

"I suppose they should be." Willowpelt replied in a hushed voice, keeping her herself steady, following closely behind Whitestorm. Waterpaw went after Mousefur, feeling her legs trembling, yet she could tell it was a little easier the first time she crossed. Was it the excitement making it easier? Or was just the fact she's done it before? She shook her head to clear it realizing how silly it made her sound thinking about it. She made it across and that's all that matters.

Bluestar led them up the hill, then down into Fourtrees with the rest of the Clans—who were already mingling with each other, Clans talking with other Clans. It was a truce again. Had Brokenstar

changed his mind? The thought soon faded as she neared the medcine cats, Mudfur and a new face she hadn't seen. His face was covered in different patches of brown, and he had a stumpy tail which barley showed as he sat down.

"I'm Barkface," the brown tom meowed, dipping his head.

"I'm Waterpaw. I'm the new medicine cat apprentice." she boasted, puffing out her chest.

Mudfur greeted her with a purr and rubbed his cheek with hers. "How's the medicine cat life treating you?"

"Good," she purred. Should they tell them of their deputy's death? She held her breath, waiting to see if Spottedleaf would say anything.

"Where is Yellowfang?" asked Spottedleaf, as she glanced around them, realizing the flat-faced she-cat wasn't here.

"Not sure. ShadowClan is here though." Mudfur replied pointing his muzzle over to the two ShadowClan cats sitting a few fox-lengths away. One was a brown tabby with gashes all across his face and the other was darker than the night itself, which Waterpaw guessed to be Nightpelt—the warrior they ran into when heading to the Moonstone.

"Perhaps she had to stay back," Waterpaw mewed.

Spottedleaf shot her a glance and placed her tail over Waterpaw's flank, "that can happen at times," she finished for her, as if wanting to hide the fact they went into battle. Were they not allowed to tell them? Would that mean she couldn't tell them about Lionheart?

A yowl rose from the ledge of the leaders and all eyes turned to face them, their pelts glimmering from the moonlight. Bluestar stepped forward first, though she seemed to be trembling with fear. "We have a new deputy," she began, her voice carrying over the crowd, and showed no signs of dismay as she spoke, "after the death of Lionheart, I have chose Tigerclaw as the deputy of ThunderClan."

Tigerclaw raised his head high and puffed out his chest as all eyes

turned to him. Waterpaw narrowed her eyes. How dare he gloat. She thought, though she was glad Bluestar had mentioned their deputy's passing. Bluestar then went on after the crowd of cats called his name a few times, "Though we were able to recover after the battle." she finished, flashing an angry glance at Brokenstar.

"You were warned about what would happen if you didn't agree." He sneered.

"I will not give up my territory." she growled, digging her claws into the stone below her.

Tallstar stepped in between them, "There is a truce tonight, remember?"

"There is no truce now." hissed Brokenstar, lashing his tail angrily. Was he going to fight them now? Was this going to turn into a full blodd bath? Waterpaw widened her eyes. She wasn't ready for something like this. They had no herbs with them. It was a long way back to camp. She doubted the medicine cats would work together to heal another Clan.

"Look!" yowled Crookedstar flicking his tail up at the night sky. Dark clouds overhang, hiding the full moon, darkening the ferns and heather that surrouned them. All eyes glowed in fear as the cloud grew bigger and bigger. "StarClan is angry. There must be a truce tonight." he finished with a growl.

Brokenstar bristled his fur than relaxed, keeping his claws unsheathed. "Very well." his growl was low. "But this doesn't mean we're finished." He leaped off the rock and and led his Clan off the island. Bluestar and Tallstar shot a concerned look with one another, not sure what they'll do if he drives them out again. WindClan had just returned from the help of Graypaw and Firepaw. Bluestar had sent them to go find them—they found the Clan hiding in a tunnel near some twolegs. Waterpaw shuddered. Another battle with ShadowClan and Bluestar could lose another life—Waterpaw didn't know how many more lives she had. What if it was her last? That would mean Tigerclaw would become Tigerstar. But would StarClan really grant him his nine lives if they knew what he's done?

"We can't afford another battle with ShadowClan." Waterpaw murmured loud enough for Spottedleaf to hear.

"I know." Spottedleaf whispered, guiding her away as Bluestar leaped down from the ledge as it was obvious the meeting was adjourned. "Bluestar is a strong leader," she reassured her, "she won't let her Clan fail."

Waterpaw wasn't entirely convinced. She knew Bluestar was a strong leader, but could she really handle Brokenstar by herself? RiverClan had already agreed to share apart of their territory—Tallstar probably agreed as well, he wouldn't want to be driven out again.

Chapter Thirteen

The cold gripped the forest floors, making everything freeze in its path. Waterpaw shivered as the morning frost drifted through the den. "It's leaf-bare already?" she meowed, waking up to find a thin blanket of white covering their camp.

"With it coming this early, it's not going to be easy," replied Spottedleaf, who was already up and counting through some of the herbs they had collected last night. "And we're in need of more catmint." she added with an annoyed sigh.

"We were supposed to get that this morning." replied Waterpaw as she stretched out her limbs and yawned.

"We should of last night. I don't know why I didn't see the signs." Spottedleaf looked up at her, sprigs of marigold stems still clinging to her paw, "Perhaps not all is lost. Check both places for catmint, near the twoleg dens and by the Great Sycamore. Maybe some were speared."Waterpaw widened her eyes. Near ShadowClan territory? Where Brokenstar had said, 'we're not finished'—obviously he meant there was going to be another battle. Was Spottedleaf not thinking straight? "Waterpaw, what are you waiting for? Go." Spottedleaf ordered, flicking her tail in annoyance.

Waterpaw shook her head then fled out of the medicine den and up the ravine, almost sliding across the snow. It was cold beneath her paws, but her thick fur kept the rest of her body warm as she fluffed it out. The twoleg dens were more than likely to be empty, so she didn't have to worry about sneaking around. She trekked through the snowy brambles and squeezed through a wide, wooden fence. The garden— where the catmint usually is—was all frosted over. Waterpaw made her way through each of the plants, pawing at every one, hoping to find at least a few leaves. *There has to be at least one*. She searched through them again, frantically swishing her tail with nerves. Not one was speared. They were all gone just the first snowfall.

Waterpaw angrily padded down the path and squeezed through the other side of the fence leading her to a thick forest of trees. A small, winding dirt road split across them, leading to the old thunderpath. Waterpaw leaped down from a ledge and followed the path she knew well, though it was covered with many kinds of tracks from birds to rabbits to squirrels—even some other prints Waterpaw hadn't seen before.

A breeze drifted her way and she let out a shiver, "Brrr." she mewed, shaking out her fluff. *Hopefully there's some catmint here.* She trekked further along, the footprints now disappearing and her own creating new ones. Not to far a head was the sycamore trees; she could see them in the distance, just further down a hill. Coming closer, she had forgotten how huge they were. They towered over her, high in the sky, touching the clouds. Their branches spread across the canopy, intertwined with one another. Mesmerized, she stared at them, feeling like a mouse and the tree was the cat, ready to pounce at any moment.

She shook her head to clear it, then padded further until she could almost taste the catmint. But to her surprise, it, too, was frosted over. Was it just her imagination that it smelled so fresh? She looked closer, digging through a layer of snow. "This can't be good at all," she mumbled to herself.

"Waterpaw?" meowed a voice in the distance.

Waterpaw pricked her ears and bristled her fur. Was it a patrol coming for her? They wouldn't hurt a medicine cat though, would they? She turned around, and pulled back her ears, ready for a fight. What she saw shocked her—it was Littlepaw, Clawface's apprentice. She had seen him first at the Gathering, and again after that. Was he stalking her? "Littlepaw," she mewed, a little weary, "shouldn't you be on a patrol?"

Littlepaw nodded his head, "Yeah, but I saw you and just wanted to say hi. Did your Clan recover from the battle?" he whispered from across the thunderpath.

Waterpaw padded closer, glancing over to make sure none of the ShadowClan warriors were around, in case there was some sort of

ambush. Though, there was a flicker of empathy in his voice. "Most, yes. Some are healing a bit slow." she admitted cooly.

"Same here. I have a scratch on my shoulder that won't heal." He turned to show her a nasty gash sliced across his shoulder. Dried blood still clung to her fur. *Didn't he care to wash his own wound*? Waterpaw thought bitterly. "Have Yellowfang rub some marigold poultice on it." she replied, crouching near the thunderpath, but still careful enough to be too close, in case a monster was to run past her.

"I can't," Littlepaw lowered his head, imitating Waterpaw's position, "she's gone. We don't have a medicine cat right now. Runningnose is in the process of learning."

Waterpaw widened her eyes. Yellowfang was gone? Why? "What happened to Yellowfang?" she asked, almost shaking. Did Brokenstar... she couldn't even think of the word. She closed her eyes and shook her head, getting it out of her head.

"Brokenstar drove her out. She's been killing our kits and betraying us."

"Do believe that?"

"I-I don't know. Brokenstar can be ambitous. But he's not a liar. He's been a good leader for several moons."

Waterpaw didn't know their leader. She's only seen him the last two moons at the Gathering. And both times, he's been very hostile—threatening for battle, and killing the deputy, leaving Bluestar no choice but to name Tigerclaw. She didn't want to believe him, but he showed no signs of guilt.

"What herb is over there?" Littlepaw asked, pointing with his muzzle to herbs she tried digging up earlier.

"Catmint." she confessed, "we're all out, and it's all frosted over."

"Oh, I actually know where some of those are. I heard Runningnose mention it yesterday. He has plenty. I can bring some back for you. Meet me here tonight." He bounded away before Waterpaw could

even argue. She watched as he faded from view with the rest of his Clanmates. What would she tell Spottedleaf? That she had to come back and check again later. She couldn't tell her a ShadowClan apprentice was secretly helping her.

Padding back into the entrance of the medicine den, Spottedleaf looked up, hope filled her amber eyes, but quickly turned to worry as she saw Waterpaw empty-jawed. "I was afraid of this." she meowed, pacing the den floors.

"I think I may know where some is." Waterpaw blurted out.

Spottedleaf stopped in her tracks, her head cocked to the side. "Then why didn't you grab some?" Obviously confused—if she knew where they were, then certainly she would have brought some back.

Waterpaw shuffled her paws and twitched her tail nervously. She sat down and wrapped her tail over her front paws, trying to hide her nerves, though she was sure Spottedleaf saw right through her. "I-there's a ShadowClan apprentice who's helping me and I'm to meet him tonight for it." she whispered faster than she intended, but Spottedleaf had no trouble hearing by the looks of it.

Her nose twitched with amusement, and she flicked her ear. "A ShadowClan apprentice is helping us?" she repeated, as if she didn't believe the words she was hearing.

Chapter Fourteen

Waterpaw couldn't believe Spottedleaf agreed to let her go tonight to meet him again. She felt a wave of relief and perhaps and bit excitement. *Do I actually want to see him again?* She asked herself, trekking rather fast through the snow. Small droplets of cold water began to sprinkle down onto Waterpaw's fur, making her shiver. She glanced up to find it flurrying tiny white specks flowing down in slow motion towards her nostrils and eyes. She blinked the snowflakes away and padded on as she saw a familiar shape in the shadows. "Littlepaw," she purred, "it's good to see you again."

Littepaw flicked his tail in greeting, a big bundle of catmint in his jaws. The fresh scent filled Waterpaw's nose. Littlepaw looked down the thunderpath, then bolted across, his powerful legs pushing him faster as a monster sounded in the distance—it's eyes brighter than the sun beaming down at him. He stopped, panting hard, herbs still in his jaws. "Hey Waterpaw." he purred back, dropping the catmint in front of her paws, "It's kind of weird being on this side of the thunderpath."

Waterpaw purred with amusement, "it's just as weird having you over here on this side." she admitted. She glanced at his scratched shoulder, seeing if had gone to see Runningnose. It was still covered in dried blood. "You still haven't gotten your shoulder looked at?"

"Runningnose doesn't know much about herbs yet. He knows what the herbs are, but just not which ones heal what yet. Yellowfang was driven out before he could teach him everything."

Waterpaw touched his flank with her tail, "Was Runningnose a warrior before becoming a medicine cat?" she asked, interested in why he was interested so late.

"Yeah. He's a senior warrior."

"What made him so interested?" Waterpaw couldn't hold in her curiosity.

"Not really sure." he sighed, "he just showed up in the den one day. Yellowfang was teaching him the herbs for about a moon, then that's when Brokenstar made her leave because she killed the kits." A monster zoomed past them, making a breeze of snow drift through their fur. Littlepaw looked up at silverpelt, "It's getting late, you should probably get going. And the snow is starting to come down harder. If it's to storm, you wouldn't want to be caught in it." he nudged her flank with his, then bounded across the thunderpath with ease.

Waterpaw picked up the bundle of catmint, and watched to make sure he made it safely to other side. When she turned, she saw him looking back at her, his bright blue eyes gleaming with pride. "Thank you." she whispered, not sure if he could hear her, but to her surprise he dipped his head. She turned away, not wanting to see if he would linger much longer. She couldn't understand the sudden feeling rising in her chest. Was it her nerves? Was she still nervous about the meeting, like they'd be caught, or maybe ambushed? Or was it something deeper? She shook her head, clearing away her thoughts of Littlepaw—the piercing blue eyes staring softly at her from across the thunderpath.

"Oh great StarClan, that is a nice bundle. They had that much?" Spottedleaf didn't hide her suprise, as Waterpaw dropped it in the pile.

"Runningnose, the er... apprentice is in training and gathered a bunch before the frost." She couldn't tell Spottedleaf about Yellowfang. At least not yet.

"Great. Let's chew off the stems and see how much we have. Your friend, Littlepaw might have just saved our Clan." Spottedleaf openly admitted.

Waterpaw was surprised she didn't ask her any more questions, though she was also glad. She didn't want to accidentally spill anything Littlepaw had told her. Waterpaw settled next to her mentor, crouching low and chewed off the stems by holding the leaves softly in her paws. Both of them were quiet; only the soft breeze of the snow blowing through the den was heard, and the soft breathing of Smallear in the back of the den. He had come last

night with a cough—Patchpelt was complaining and brought him to the medicine den.

"Waterpaw, will you look at what you're doing?" growled Spottedleaf, slapping her paw on the ground, "Goodness, you're distracted lately. Your no better than a kit. Why don't you check on Smallear, and take some of this," she pushed her neatly piled catmint leaves toward her. "He's been wheezing on and off, and he had a fever moments before you came in. I had given him some feverfew and lavender to help him sleep."

"He has greencough?" she asked, though she wasn't surprised.

"Yes, it could spread easily if we don't treat it soon." Spottedleaf meowed as if to urge her to get there faster.

Waterpaw padded up to Smallear, his old age shown in his graying muzzle. "Wake up, and eat some of this catmint." she whispered in his small, rounded ears. He wheezed, and opened his eyes groggily, blinking a few times before lapping up the leaves. He scrunched his nose and licked the top of his paw. "I'll get some honey for the taste," she explained as she leaped over to the ledge and found a puddle of it sitting in a large leaf. She grabbed an oak leaf and dunked into the honey, then dragged it over to the old tom. He lapped it up without hesitation.

Dawn broke through the medicine den, a small beam of light poking down. Cold gripped the forest floors, and the ground was covered with a thick white blanket. It had snow a lot. Waterpaw woke up to Spottedleaf frantically going around and giving catmint to several cats in their den. Waterpaw gasped. Where had they all come from? Do all them have greencough? She raced to help Spottedleaf grabbing more catmint, some of it already wilting away. Was this actually enough catmint to last them? She gave the last bit she had in her mouth to Mousefur, the brown warrior. His eyes streamed down to his nose and wheezed with every breath.

"There," meowed Spottedleaf, "all are treated, and we still have some left to spear. I was worried there for a moment."

Waterpaw was relieved she had read her mind, she felt exahusted

and it was still early in the morning. They had six cats in the den with greencough. They barely had enough room to zig-zag around them to the small pool in the back.

Chapter Fifteen

Waterpaw shook out her fluff, and stretched out her limbs and flexing her claws. The last few days were exhausting, but they were able to get through the sick cats. The only one left was Mousefur, who still has a fever. Spottedleaf gave her some more feverfew last night, so all they can do now is just wait.

There was only a bit more catmint, but not enough to last the whole winter. Waterpaw longed to go back to Littlepaw and see if they had any more to spare, but even she knew they would probably need as much as they can as well. She didn't want to take their whole supply.

"The catmint might worth checking now that the frost has gone down a bit today." Spottedleaf mewed as if to be reading Waterpaw's thoughts. Snow still covered the ground and branches, but it was at least warmer. The sun peaked through the trees, shining directly into the den, making Waterpaw's pelt glimmer.

"Should I go now, or wait till sun high so it has time to melt down a bit?"

"Better wait till sun high." Spottedleaf pricked her ears as she heard something just outside the entrance.

A yowl came from the clearing and a cat screeching filled the camp. Waterpaw quickly turned to see what was all the commotion about. Longtail and Darkstripe were dragging in a rather large gray she-cat. Her face was flattened and her ears rounded and pulled back as she made a furious hiss, spitting at the senior warriors who now had her by the scruff of the neck.

Waterpaw recognized her immediately—it was Yellowfang, the ShadowClan medicine cat. They've found her. She remembered Littlepaw mentioning about her exile. Brokenstar had driven her out, leaving her to be a rogue. Bluestar came running out of leader's den, her eyes blazing with anger.

"What has happened?" she demanded, halting in front of them, and calmly stared at the former ShadowClan medicine cat.

"We found her in our territory trying to hunt." Darkstripe lowered his head and hissed as he let Yellowfang go, but kept his claws still in her flank.

"I wasn't stealing prey," the old gray she-cat growled, blood now pooured down her eyebrow, "I was just passing through because...."

"You were stealing our prey!" growled Darkstripe, lashing his paw across her ear.

, "Let her go." Bluestar meowed hoarsely, glancing at Darkstripe and Longtail who was still holding her by the scruff and dug his teeth harder into her neck.

Longtail took a step back, some clumps of fur still stuck to his jaws. "She's a traitor." Longtail growled, "we caught her just outside the Great Oaks tree eating a mouse."

"I gave her the mouse." Firepaw stepped foward, Graypaw at his side, though the gray tom didn't seem to know he was secretly giving her mice. He shot him a confused glance. Was he just sticking up for her? Does he know about Brokenstar driving her out too?

Bluestar's gaze darkened and she turned to the flame-colored tom, "you were feeding her a mouse? Why?"

"She was starving and hurt." he replied, shuffling his paws on the snow beneath him. No, he couldn't have known by that answer. Waterpaw thought, stepping a little closer, realizing all the cats were out of the dens now.

Bluestar didn't say anything for a few moments, looking over at Yellowfang—she was crouched low to the ground, her fur dampend at the ends where her belly laid. "She can stay here as of now where we can keep an eye on her," Bluestar finally meowed.

"She could stay in the medicine den," Waterpaw made her through the crowd of cats, not taking her eyes off of the battered medicine

cat. She had unhealed scratches and a few new ones across her face and flank as if she put up a good fight, "Please, she has wounds that need herbs," she added, pleading.

"Very well," Bluestar dipped her head. She turned to Firepaw sitting a few tail-lengths in front of her, "you will tend to her wounds as punishment."

Punishment? Waterpaw thought to herself. Would she be punished if she had done the same?

"She's a traitor, and you're going to just reward her by feeding her and healing her scractches and bites?" hissed Longtail, clearly not afraid to challenge his leader.

Bluestar narrowed her blue-green eyes to slits, but kept her shoulders relaxed as she spoke, "She is alone. For now, all we can do is keep her here until we know more." Though she gave a satisfying enough answer, Longtail didn't seem convinced. He lashed his long yellow tail in anger, but didn't question Bluestar again as he padded away after Darkstripe. Bluestar turned back to Yellowfang, "Waterpaw and Spottedleaf will welcome you in the medicine den if you'd like to get some rest."

Yellowfang opened her wide jaws—her yellow tooth poking out more than usual—as if she was going to protest, but turned to follow Waterpaw with a flick of her gray, plumbing tail. Waterpaw longed to question her; to ask if she really did kill those kits. She didn't seem like she would hurt kits. Waterpaw stiffened. But if she did... Would she hurt *their* kits? Waterpaw shook her head. No. She wouldn't, she convinced herself. Yellowfang is a medicine cat. We're not supposed to kill, especially kits.

Yellowfang limped to the medicine den entrance, greeting Spottedleaf with a slight nod. Firepaw followed behind, his head and tail held high. Waterpaw admired the orange tom. He had the strength of a warrior. He was agile, a good hunter, and got along with most of the Clanmates. He had earned their respect, but after today, that might have been changed.

"What should I give her?" asked Firepaw as he made his way into

the den and glanced at all of the herbs.

"Dock. Chew it into a poultice, and put it on her scratches. She has a quite a few, so you'll need about this much," mewed Spottedleaf grabbing a few leaves into her mouth and dropped them to his paws, "and then some poppy seeds, she might need it to help calm her nerves."

"I don't need poppy seeds," hissed Yellowfang as she laid outside of the medicine den.

"At least come inside the den." Firepaw meowed before Waterpaw had the chance to say it, as if he was reading her mind.

"I'm fine out here. I won't be fussed over like some kit. I can lick my own wounds." she finished with a growl.

"Then at least sleep on this," Waterpaw muffled, holding a piece of dry moss in her jaws. "It'll keep you warm. It's leaf-bare afterall." Yellowfang took a deep sigh, then got up so Waterpaw could lay it down, then she laid back, letting Firepaw apply the poultice.

Chapter Sixteen

"We're under attack!" Someone yowled from across the clearing. Waterpaw heaved herself up, wide eyed, looking out. What had happened? And who was attacking us? It had to be ShadowClan. But again? And so soon? Yellowfang couldn't have planned something like this. She'd been with them for almost a half-moon now. Her wounds were now healed, and she rested in the empty space near the medicine den. It had a few stone pieces around to block the wind, so she didn't feel so cold during the night. Firepaw had come in daily for the herbs, getting to know Waterpaw, though she noticed he seemed to only to chat with Spottedleaf.

"Waterpaw quick, get some..." Spottedleaf was suddenly pushed to the ground by a dark brown tom, his yellow eyes blazing like fire. He slashed and kicked with his claws, but she was too quick and leaped over him, pinning him to the ground. He was stronger than her, his muscles flexing as he pushed his back legs up and flinged her backwards; it made her tumble into Waterpaw, sending both of them feel winded. Spottedleaf shook out her fur, then bristled her fur, "Clawface," she hissed.

Clawface ran, claws unsheathed and sprang onto her, clenching his powerful jaws onto her neck. Waterpaw jumped onto him, but he was too quick and ducked. She missed her blow, which sent her onto her stomach. Some snow still clinged to the ground, making her feel sopping wet as she skidded to a halt. She shook out her pelt, then turned back to Spottedleaf, but when she looked, Clawface was gone and Spottedleaf laid there, motionless. Waterpaw raced to her, eyes wide with fear.

"Spottedleaf, get up." she meowed, her ears pounding from the screeching cats still in battle around her. "Spottedleaf, please. I can't do this on my own." she wailed, pressing her forward in her mentors bleeding neck. "Please," she whispered, "StarClan bring her back." She looked up at silverpelt, pleading, praying they would send her back and just tell her what to do. But StarClan gave her no

answer. They were silent as the clouds drifted slowly away.

Spottedleaf's eyes darkened, and Waterpaw knew she was alone. She took a step back, then turned to see Yellowfang was gone too. Where did Yellowfang go? She looked around frantically, hoping to find the gray she-cat, but she wasn't among the fighting cats. Firepaw and Graypaw were fighting side by side with a dark tom, Waterpaw recognized to be Nightpelt, a senior warrior. Tracks below her lead up and over the medicine den. Is that where Clawface had gone? She quickly followed the tracks, leaving the battle behind her. Clawface had killed her mentor, and she was not going to let him go. She could never kill a warrior, but she would bring him back as prisoner. How... she hadn't a clue.

She trekked a little faster through the tall pine and then the forest of thick oak trees, where the tracks then stopped. Had she been following the wrong tracks? Then she pricked her ears, suddenly aware she might be in danger. This could just be a trap. She crouched down and ran to a bramble bush. "Ouch." she hissed as some brambles stuck to her thick white patches of fur. She mostly blended in with the snow, except for her ginger and brown splotches on her flank chest and face.

She peeked out from the bramble bush, pulling back her ears. No one had jumped out. Suddenly a dark figure walked past her, thick-furred. Waterpaw stiffened. Had he found her? Had he come for her? She held her breath and closed her eyes.

"Waterpaw? It's you," Yellowfang rasped, brushing the brambles down with her tail.

"Yellowfang? You were the tracks I was following." Waterpaw wasn't disappointed. She was much happier she found Yellowfang and not Clawface. Perhaps they could now work together. "Spottedleaf is..."

"I know, I couldn't... I'm sorry. I ran after Clawface after I saw it happen and.."

"Where is he?"

"I couldn't get to him." she rasped, still out of breath from running.

"We can go together," she came to Yellowfang's side, some brambles still sticking to her flank.

Yellowfang brushed it off with her tail again, letting the young she-cat fuss over her just this once. "No, we can't both go."

"Waterpaw?" It was Firepaw, padding up to them as the snow began to trickle down into tiny snowflakes on their pelts. "You found Yellowfang." he meowed, then widened his eyes as he saw Waterpaw's forehead still covered in blood. "Are you okay? What happened?"

"Clawface has killed Spottedleaf and I went after him." Yellowfang meowed.

"And where are the kits?" Firepaw asked.

Waterpaw and Yellowfang both tilted their head to the side in unison, both clearly confused. "The kits? Whose kits?" Yellowfang quickly meowed, now her yellow eyes filled with concern.

"You don't know?"

"How could I? After I saw Clawface killing Spottedleaf, I ran after him. But with my old age, I couldn't keep up for much longer."

Waterpaw took a step forehead, "Do they think Yellowfang did it?"

"They think she killed Spottedleaf and ran with the kits."

"You don't believe that? Do you?" Waterpaw could feel voice crack. Did he really believe it? He couldn't. He took of her for so long. Even after his punishment was finished. He wouldn't think of her as still a traitor.

"No, I don't believe that." he meowed, "but we have to convince them somehow."

"I can bring back the kits." Yellowfang quickly offered, "I can bring them back. I know some of the elders and senior warriors will stand

with me. We can overthrow Brokenstar once and for all. But we'll need your help. I'll come back with the warriors. I'll meet you back here." Then she quickly padded away into the snow, her once gray fur almost turning white as she faded from view.

Waterpaw took a deep sigh then sat down. "So what, we wait?" she turned to face Firepaw who was already on his toes, head up, sniffing the air. "What is it?" she asked, getting up and looking around.

"It's Whitestorm," Firepaw whispered, relaxing his bristled fur. "We've found Yellowfang. She's gone to get some other warriors to help us overthrow Brokenstar. She said she'll meet us here."

Whitestorm twitched his tail impatiently-Longtail, Mousefur, Willowpelt, and Runningwind behind him-as if he was going to oppose. He yellow eyes softened and he looked down at the orange tom. "Alright. We'll wait for her here, then. How long will she be?"

Firepaw shrugged his shoulders, "I don't know." he admitted, "she didn't say."

Whitestorm didn't seem to like the sound of that, but waited anyway. They all sat down, their tails twitching nervously, until finally a familiar shape came out from the shadows with some others Waterpaw did not recognize.

Chapter Seventeen

Yellowfang padded up to them, "I have Ashfur, Archeye, Hollyflower and Brightflower." she meowed as was within earshot.

Waterpaw greeted them with a nod, "I'm Waterpaw, the medicine cat apprentice." she meowed, but kept her eyes low, not able to look at them. She couldn't tell them of Spottedleaf's death, though she guessed they might have already known from the sorrowful glances they gave her as she spoke.

"We want Brokenstar gone." meowed the old queen, her golden pelt glimmered, and her face was flat, much like Yellowfang's.

"We can get your kits back." meowed the older gray tom. Though he was old, he was strong.

Waterpaw couldn't hide in her thanks and purred, "thank you."

Whitestorm dipped his head, "We'll come," he meowed, "Firepaw, Graypaw, are you up for another battle?" The two apprenticed glanced at one another then both nodded, narrowing their eyes. Whitestorm then glanced at Waterpaw, "what will you do, can you fight?" he almost sounded as if he was pleading for more help. Why didn't he bring more warriors? Were most of them hurt? She couldn't do it all by herself. Not without Spottedleaf. But she had no choice—she surely couldn't fight with ShadowClan.

"I should stay back." she finally meowed, sitting down and sinked into the snow below her.

"Very well, lead the way, Yellowfang."

Despite her old age, Yellowfang bounded across the snow, leading them to the thunderpath and into ShadowClan territory. Waterpaw could only watch as they faded from view in the mist of the snow. She couldn't stay here, not with her all bruised up from the battle. She widened her eyes and stiffened, clawing the ground below

beneath her. *Oh no! What if Tigerclaw had got to Bluestar*? She raced back to ThunderClan, not thinking twice about it—if Bluestar had lost another life, she would only have one left. And he might not stop until it's her last.

The camp was left in pieces, brambles lay everywhere, and sticks scattered across the clearing. It's likea storm had come through and hit only ThunderClan. Dustpaw and Sandpaw were over by the apprentices' den trying to gather the sticks and put it back together. Brindleface and Goldenflower were by the nursery trying to calm down Frostfur who had lost her kits. And Bluestar and Tigerclaw were by the leader's den speaking in hushed voices.

Waterpaw crouched down and headed for the medicine den, making sure to stay out of sight. She padded a little closer, pricking her ear up to listen to what Tigerclaw was saying. "Yellowfang is nothing but a traitor. Didn't I tell you?" he growled, almost too low for Waterpaw to hear.

"We still don't know that." she whispered back.

"She killed Spottedleaf, isn't that proof enough?"

"I will not risk it. We're already left without a medicine cat." Bluestar lashed her tail.

Waterpaw gasped. They didn't know she was here. They probably thought she was taken away by Yellowfang. She shook her head and ran around the medicine den to make it seem like she was just coming into camp. "I know who killed Spottedleaf." she yowled loud enough for the whole Clan to hear.

All eyes looked at her, and she suddenly felt uncomfortable, then gulped as she padded towards Bluestar and Tigerclaw, who were now wide-eyed. She heaved herself up onto the highrock and scanned the clearing as the cats gazed up at her. "Yellowfang did not kill her," shocked glances and gasps spread through the cats, "Clawface killed Spottedleaf while some of the others stole the kits. Yellowfang went after Clawface, and I followed." she finished, though they didn't seem convinced. How come they won't believe me? She leaped down from the rock, "Please," she pleaded, "you

have to believe me. Yellowfang is innocent. She's only only here to help us."

"But Brokenstar had said," hissed a dark tabby tom,

"Silence, Darkstripe." meowed Bluestar as she padded up the highrock. "We have no choice but to believe her. Let's see what happens when they return. " she meowed, looking at each of the cats, their eyes glowing as the sun began to go down.

"ThunderClan can't be seen as weak, our camp still has a lot to do." growled Tigerclaw as he leaped onto the highrock beside his leader. Waterpaw scoffed, and headed to the medicine den. Spottedleaf's body was gone, but her blood stains still clung to the snow where she laid. Waterpaw hung her head low as she passed by, not able to see it any longer. She brushed more snow over, covering it up with her back paws. Sighing, she padded inside to find the herbs scattered everywhere. They were sacked! It's like someone had come in and swiped their tail alongside every crevice.

Waterpaw looked over at where Spottedleaf used to sleep. It was all dried up moss, but still smelled like her sweet-herb self. She tucked her paws in and laid down, nestling inside her old mentor's nest. Waterpaw tucked in her nose, drawing in her fading scent one last time—already fainting beneath the sharp smell of crushed herbs and cold stone. "I can't do this without you," she whispered, closing her eyes. She trembled, not able to sleep, no matter how tightly she could squeeze them shut, the image of Spottedleaf's lifeless body lying in the snow refused to escape.

Outside, the Clan still carried on, putting the camp back in order. She then heard rushed footsteps into the clearing and she pricked up her head to see and listen. She could just see a faint a blur of orange, gray and another few cats come racing into the clearing. They were back. Did they get rid of Brokenstar? Waterpaw heaved herself up, though the image of her mentor's death still in her head, and padded to the entrance to find Yellowfang holding the ShadowClan leader, Brokenstar by the scruff of the neck as if he was a kit. His eyes were closed shut, blood pouring down, and his ears were completely torn. Was their leader dead?

"We have helped ShadowClan overthrow Brokenstar." meowed Whitestorm, dipping his head to his lead—who was still sitting on the highrock alongside Tigerclaw.

"My kits!" Frostfur exclaimed racing over to them and she held them close to her belly, "Thank you, Whitestorm." she purred.

Whitestorm turned to her, "It is not me who you should thank, but Yellowfang. She is the one who saved them for us."

Frostfur turned to the old flat-faced she-cat, "Thank you, Yellowfang. I am sorry," she mewed without hesitation.

Yellowfang dipped her head, but kept silent, then turned to Waterpaw whose once bright amber eyes were darkened. She padded over to her sat down, resting her tail on her flank, as if to be sharing the same pain, the same feeling, that Spottedleaf really is gone.

Chapter Eighteen

Bluestar looked as if she was searching for a specific cat. Then her icy blue gaze stopped on Firepaw. "Whitestorm," she mewed. "Did Graypaw and Firepaw fight well against Brokenstar?"

Whitestorm lifted his head and hesitated, thinking back to the battle they had in ShadowClan. He nodded his head. "Yes, they both fought like warriors."

Bluestar dipped her head in thanks then looked back on the rest of the clan. "Firepaw and Graypaw please come forward."

Firepaw and Graypaw dipped their head and came forward. Bluestar looked down at them, then up at the night sky of silverpelt. "I, Bluestar, leader of ThunderClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on these apprentices. They have trained hard to understand your noble code, and I commend them to a warrior in your turn." She looked down at Firepaw. "Firepaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code, and to protect and defend your Clan even at the cost of your life?"

Firepaw hesitated. "Yes, I do." he finally mewed, looking up at Bluestar with his gleaming green eyes.

Bluestar looked up at silverpelt again, then meowed. "Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. Firepaw, from this moment on, you will be known as," Bluestar paused looking down at the apprentice, as if she was studying him. "Fireheart. StarClan honors your courage and loyalty and we welcome you as a full warrior to ThunderClan." she then continued, "Graypaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code, and to protect and defend your Clan even at the cost of your life?"

"I do." he purred.

Bluestar looked up at silverpelt and spoke the ancient words again. "Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name.

Graypaw, from this moment on, you will be known as, Graystripe." She rested her muzzle on Fireheart's head first, and he licked her shoulder in response, then did the same with Graystripe.

"Fireheart! Graystripe! Fireheart Graystripe" yowled the Clan.

Waterpaw was still sitting near Yellowfang, her head hung low. "Fireheart, Graystripe!" she shouted, even though she didn't want to be celebrating at the moment. Yellowfang pressed against her.

Bluestar then turned to the old she-cat, "Yellowfang," she meowed padding up to her, " you used to be the medicine cat of ShadowClan. We have recently lost ours, and Waterpaw still needs a mentor. Will you join us?"

Yellowfang looked around, all eyes on her. Waterpaw could feel her trembling, and her heart pounded. Was it fear? Yellowfang then dipped her head and closed her eyes, "I would be honored to become your medicine cat." she rasped.

Waterpaw gleamed with joy. Yellowfang as *her* mentor? She was older and wiser—which meant she probably knew everything. Perhaps she could tell her about the prophecy. She would know at least something, right? But tonight couldn't be the night she told her yet. She first had to tell her about Tigerclaw, their deputy.

Fireheart and Graystripe went to go sit vigil for the night, while the rest of the Clan went back to into their nests to sleep. Waterpaw caught of glimpse of Tigerclaw speaking to Fireheart, then bounded off towards Bluestar. Didn't Fireheart know he wasn't supposed to talk? Or did Tigerclaw just say something to him? Waterpaw shook her head to clear it. Perhaps it was nothing, and her mind was just playing tricks on her.

"Waterpaw? You coming?" rasped Yellowfang.

Waterpaw didn't reply. She was still staring at Tigerclaw who was looking across the clearing with narrowed slits. She stiffened. Was he looking at her? She followed his gaze—he was glaring at Fireheart, but why?

"Waterpaw," Yellowfang rasped again, then cleared her throat and rumbled out a low growl.

Waterpaw shook her head to clear it, then blinked at Yellowfang with a blank stare, "Sorry, what?"

"Come on, we can clean up at dawn. Right now we should get some sleep." she ordered, swishing her tail to and fro.

Waterpaw sighed then padded inside the medicine den, missing the sweet-scented she-cat. She missed her dark tortoiseshell-and-white fur. She missed her bright amber eyes—they way she would look at her and know she was distracted or how amazed she was when she already knew an herb. She remembered the first day she came into the den, and Spottedleaf saying she had a gift. She curled up into Spottedleaf's old nest, though her scent was now gone and was filled her own, she laid down and wrapped her tail over her front paws.

Sleep still not able to come, she tossed and turned almost all night, her amber eyes wide awake. Yellowfang came over to her dropped a few herbs in front of her. "Eat these. It'll help. You know they will." she urged, touching her flank with the tip of her tail for a mere moment, then heading to back of the den—where she made a new nest with some of the fresh moss near the pool of water.

Waterpaw could already identify the herbs before she even looked down just from the scent. Poppy seeds, to help her sleep, and lavender to calm the nerves. She lapped them up, knowing they would help, though she didn't want sleep to come. She knew what she would dream. She knew what she would see. She didn't want the image of it in her head anymore. She shook her head. *Please StarClan! I can't keep seeing it. I just can't.* She pleaded to them, closing her eyes tightly. Then she melted into the nest below her, and finally let sleep take over.